

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

DESTROYER'S WAR

BEHIND THE FLEETS

THE MERCHANT NAVY FIGHTS

THE WAKE OF THE RAIDERS

DEEDS THAT HELD THE EMPIRE: AT SEA

ETC., ETC.

NAVIES IN EXILE



A. D. DIVINE, D.S.M.

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POLAND

CHAPTER I

I

A BOMB hit the torpedo-boat *Mazur*. In the thunder of the explosion twenty men were killed; the thin plating of her sides opened; very slowly she settled in the still waters of Gdynia harbour. As she sank, the men who were alive fought on: the water reached the level of the decks, lapped over them—and still they served the guns. They held the spare ammunition clear of the encroaching flood, and as the German bombers raced in again and again to the attack, they fought them off. The water reached their knees, it reached their waists—and still they fought the guns. Not until the breeches themselves were under water did that battle cease. Not until the ship sank under them did they abandon her.

In a single hour of the first day of this greatest of all wars the small Polish Navy, new, untried, established a tradition. In the years that have passed there has been no shadow across that tradition, no stain upon the ensign that flew on *Mazur*.

The Polish Navy was new. Poland herself was new—a country reborn after a monstrous history of partitions and oppressions, a state that in a single generation had passed from servitude to greatness. But the Polish Navy was younger even than the state. In the first years of the growing, Poland had had to make her own ports. Gdynia was built from a fishing village. The Polish Mercantile Marine was built from a single ship. The Polish Navy sprang from a handful of river gunboats, minesweepers and torpedo-boats.

Not until the completion of the *Wicher* (Wind) in 1929 did the sea-going Polish Navy really begin. In the ten years from the completion of the *Wicher* there were added the *Burza* (Squall), the *Błyskawica* (Lightning) and the *Grom* (Thunderbolt). The two last were large modern destroyers, amongst the biggest in the world, ships of more than 2,000 tons, heavily armed, admirably equipped. These four ships made the main force of the Polish Navy. In addition to them there were the small torpedo-boat *Mazur*, the minelayer *Gryf*, five large submarines, eight trawler-minesweepers, and a dozen river gunboats and small monitors.

This was their fleet—a handful of small ships, many of them lightly armed, many of them not built for the open sea. It was all they had to put against the weight of Germany's heavy ships, against the pocket battleships with 11-inch guns, against the old battleships *Schleswig-Holstein* and *Schlesien*, against modern cruisers and a fleet

of powerful destroyers. From the very beginning there was no hope for the Polish Navy. From the very beginning, on paper, the fight was not worth while. And yet to-day the Polish Navy is stronger than ever it has been in its history. After more than four years of war it has a record of fighting, a career of service, that challenges comparison with the navies of the world.

And it began the battle shorn of its main strength. The cold unshakable logic of the comparison of strengths drove the Polish Admiralty, when war seemed inevitable, to a decision that is surely unique in the history of war. It was plain even in the hours before the first shot was fired, the first bomb dropped, that the Polish Navy in the Baltic could not survive. It was doubtful if it could achieve against the immeasurably stronger foe even enough success to make its annihilation worth while. The three strongest units, therefore, two days before war began, sailed under secret orders for the coast of Britain in the blind faith that from Britain they would be able to fight a wider war, to play a heavier part, in the eventual conquest of the Hun.

This is the story of the aftermath of that decision, of the glory of the little ships that were left behind, of the fight of the big ones that escaped.

II

The Polish Navy began its fight in the early morning of September 1st when high in the still air over Gdynia Bay ships fired at reconnaissance planes with the black cross of Germany upon their wings. The planes crossed the bay and passed, and there was peace for an hour or two upon the Baltic.

Then, a little before noon, the bombers came. In the first hour of that raid the *Mazur* went—the first ship to be sunk in this new war, the first of a long and tragic line. She went with her guns firing; and past her the remnants of the Fleet put out to sea—*Gryf*, *Wicher* and the minesweepers.

Again as the little flotilla reached the open waters of Puck Bay the attacks came in. Twenty bombers selected *Gryf* for their target. Bombs dropped so close that blast from them killed her commanding officer, but she survived, loaded heavily with mines. *Wicher* was attacked, but escaped by skilful manœuvring. *Mewa*, one of the trawlers, had a near miss, and almost the whole of her crew on the deck were blown by blast into the water. Her captain and the men in the engine-room alone survived, and by themselves they manned the guns. Her captain was wounded by the explosion, wounded again later, and, lying on the deck, retained the command and brought his ship to harbour.

From Gdynia *Gryf* and *Wicher* had been ordered to make for Hel. They were bombed again by night, and on Sunday, September 3rd, the Sunday of Britain's entry into the war, they were attacked in harbour by two heavy German destroyers. The Polish ships were at anchor, some of their guns were out of action, and the battle was unequal from the start. The Germans had freedom of manoeuvre and of speed, yet the leading German destroyer was hit by a salvo, badly damaged, and turned to make for Danzig. She sank before she reached the shelter of the harbour. Both the Polish ships were hit and suffered damage, but the action ended with the second German destroyer hit and retiring under a smoke screen.

Two hours later the battle was renewed from the air. *Wicher*, so damaged now that she could hardly challenge the swift-moving enemy, was hit again and again until she sank at her moorings. *Gryf* was hit and damaged until every gun was out of action. *Mazur*, *Wicher*, *Gryf*, the sea-going units of the little fleet, were done. There was one other ship, the pleasure steamer *Gdynia*, requisitioned for special service. She too was sunk near Hel harbour.

There were left the trawlers and the submarines. The trawlers were fitted for minelaying as well as for sweeping, and on the night of September 3rd they went into Danzig Bay. The Germans had there the two old battleships, twelve destroyers and a large number of light craft. In the darkness of the night the trawlers closed that fleet and dropped their mines amongst them.

This was the last thrust of the surface vessels of the Polish Navy that were left behind, and in its courage and its daring it matched the story of the men of the *Mazur* in the first hour of the unequal struggle.

III

But for those men and for the men of the sunken ships the war was not yet ended. The defence of the Polish coast remains, after three and a half years, one of the epics of the war. Oksywie, Hel and Westerplatte will stand for all time in gold among the battle honours of the Polish Navy.

From the territory of the Free City of Danzig to the German frontier at Pomerania, as an aeroplane flies, is barely thirty miles. The actual coast-line, however, includes the long recurved sand-spit that stretches from the northern mainland far out into the Gulf of Danzig and ends at Hel. The coast-line itself measures something more than seventy miles. To defend that area, to defend the whole narrow "corridor," the Poles had nine infantry battalions, only two of which were of the regular army.

On the 1st September German forces operating from Danzig on the

one hand and German Pomerania on the other had cut the "corridor" and were advancing to the sea. The Poles had little artillery, few anti-aircraft guns; but they debated every inch of territory, every stream, every gulley of the countryside.

And to the aid of the Army came the men of the Naval Reserve, the crews of the sunken ships, the staffs of the dockyards. They made in Oksywie an armed train that they called the "Kashubian Dragon," they improvised armoured cars and manned them; in the buses of Gdynia they moved as shock troops from point to point of that threatened and always retreating front; and they earned from Germany the name of "die Blauen Teufel."

Gradually the strip they held grew narrower and narrower. At Wejherowo the pressure was heaviest. Exhaustion set in—exhaustion not only of men who had been fighting for many days without rest, without sleep; but exhaustion of arms, of ammunition, of equipment.

On September 12th Gdynia was evacuated. By September 14th the defended area of the main Polish coast had diminished to eight square kilometres. Bombarded by the heavy guns of the *Schleswig-Holstein*, their anti-aircraft guns silent, the German bombing planes coming down to tree-level in their attacks, their ammunition almost exhausted, it became apparent that the end was near. Colonel Dąbek issued an order of the day: "We have nothing left to defend but our honour; we shall always be able to defend that single-handed."

On the 19th September, attacked from every side by overwhelming forces—Germany used a whole division against Oksywie—Colonel Dąbek ordered the surrender. But he himself with thirty picked men in the gorge of Babi Dół, fought to the end and killed himself with his last bullet.

There was left the peninsula of Hel. The defences of Hel consisted of one infantry battalion and one incomplete battery of four 6-inch guns manned by sailors. There were also some light coastal and anti-aircraft guns. On the 8th September German troops reached Władysławowo where the peninsula springs from the mainland, and began their push towards Hel. On an incredibly narrow front the Germans used a methodically accurate barrage and ploughed up the very soil ahead of them. On the flanks the *Schleswig-Holstein* and the *Schlesien* shelled the handful of Polish troops from the sea. The air raids never ceased. Yet until September 20th the stubbornness of the tiny garrison barred that strip of land to an army.

At the village of Chalupy, where the peninsula narrows to a thread of land, the Poles, retreating, blew up the causeway and let the sea through. For two days that held the enemy; but supplies were short, food was almost exhausted, ammunition was almost done. Slowly, bitterly, they fell back and back upon the town itself. The little

coastal batteries, answering the challenge of the battleships, hit the *Schleswig-Holstein*, put one of her turrets out of action, and killed the gun crew.

In the fighting there was an endless succession of gallantry and of daring, but never in this long battle was there hope. Behind them, deep in the hinterland, Poland was breaking before the crash and thunder of the panzer divisions. While they still fought Warsaw fell. While they still fought Russia entered the war upon the eastern frontier.

At 1.55 p.m. on October 1st, though armistice terms were already under consideration by the Germans, Hel was bombed by a strong force of German aircraft. At 1.55 the last anti-aircraft gun still in action, manned by sailors of the Polish Fleet, brought down the last German plane to crash on the territory of the Republic of Poland.

During that night there escaped from the battered and broken harbours of the peninsula a strange little flotilla of fishing vessels and motor craft. Some of them—the M.L. *Batory*, for example—reached the Swedish coast in safety: a handful made the coasts of Lithuania and Latvia. The rest the German minesweepers and patrol vessels caught. The Poles answered the fire of 4-inch guns with rifles before they were blown out of the water.

On October 2nd at two o'clock Hel capitulated.

There remains Westerplatte. Long before the last agony of the retreat down the peninsula of Hel was begun Westerplatte had surrendered, and yet in the seven days of its stand it made for itself an everlasting place in the history of Poland.

Westerplatte was a small, flat peninsula belonging to the Free City of Danzig, its whole area not a square kilometre. Upon it the Polish Government, which had leased the land, had constructed an arsenal. At the outbreak of war the staff of the establishment consisted of five officers and two hundred and sixty-five other ranks. There were no defences. This was in free territory. There were no natural obstacles; this was a flat strip on a flat foreshore.

From the first hour of the war Westerplatte was cut off from the world. The Germans held the neck of the peninsula, one of the first shells smashed the radio station. Against it Germany launched unceasing air attacks. Upon it the fire of the battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* was concentrated at short range. Up the neck of the peninsula German infantry was thrown in wave upon wave—and yet it held out. It held out though every building was blasted out of existence, though every ammunition dump had been exploded, though every tree in its narrow gardens had been felled or smashed into splinters by the roaring shells. On the seventh day, himself wounded, with only fifty men of his little garrison left, with his last ammunition exhausted, Major Sucharski capitulated. Even in the despairing

grandeur of the battle of the coast Westerplatte stands magnificent. To Major Sucharski were left his honour—and his sword.

This then was the first thirty days of Poland's Navy in action—this was the foundation of Poland's sea tradition. Of these vain battles, of these glorious defeats, there was made the superstructure of the reputation of the Polish Navy.

CHAPTER II

I

THERE were five Polish submarines on September 1st—*Sep* (Vulture), *Zbik* (Wild Cat), *Rys* (Lynx), *Wilk* (Wolf) and *Orzel* (Eagle). The Baltic is a bad sea for submarines. The British "E" class boats operating there in the war of 1914-18 found this early. There are vast stretches where the water is so shallow that escape is denied, even from surface craft. There is no corner of it too far for short-range aircraft to cover on patrol. The men of the Polish submarines must have known that without bases, without fuel supplies, without the help of friendly planes, their position was hopeless from the first. Yet with the first alarm of war they went out into the cold shallows of the sea to fight.

The *Sep* was attacked for the first time on September 3rd. Thirty-five bombs were heard by her crew to explode. There was no yard to which she could put in for repair, no place to dry-dock. Somehow they patched the damage and carried on their patrol off the enemy coast. For nine more days she kept at sea. Only on the sixteenth day of hostilities, with two of her compartments flooded and the ship all but unmanageable, did she make for Stockholm and internment.

The *Rys* was damaged on the fourth day. Fifty-three bombs were dropped about her in shallow water then. She continued until the seventeenth day, the day after the internment of the *Sep*. Then she too went to Stockholm.

The *Zbik* continued in action for twenty-five days. Remember that the Baltic from Kurisches Haff to Kiel Bay is scarcely ever more than a hundred miles wide, that these ships were carrying out offensive patrols in shallow water on the very coast of the enemy, that Germany was able to spare in those days a very considerable proportion of her air force for anti-submarine patrol work. Their survival is in itself a masterpiece of incessant vigilance and brilliant handling.

II

There remained two submarines, *Wilk* and *Orzel*. *Wilk* was damaged on the fifth day of September. She had to submerge until

she rested on the bottom far below her designed depth. On the bottom, with the pressure intolerable, she made good her damage; surfaced again and laid mines in the areas where German ships were known to congregate. For nine days after the damage she continued to patrol the Baltic. Then on the fourteenth day she received orders to break through the narrow channels of the entrance and make for England.

There are three gateways to the Baltic, or rather there is one great gateway blocked by the complex of the Danish islands—the Little Belt, bridged and very narrow, between Funen and the coast of Denmark; the Great Belt, seared with reefs, narrow, tide-ridden and dangerous, between Funen and Zealand; and the Sound between Copenhagen and the Swedish coast. Of these three only the Sound in time of war lies even in the remote bounds of possibility. The Sound is seventy miles long from Falsterbo to Kullen. Between Helsingor and Halsingborg in Sweden is three miles only. Its extreme depth is fourteen fathoms—eighty-four feet. There are shallows where a submarine even at periscope depth is almost on the bottom.

In October of 1914, when E 1 and E 9—600-ton ships, drawing far less water—ran the gauntlet of the Sound, it was held—and rightly held—to be one of the great achievements in the history of the submarine. Air reconnaissance and air attack was then in its infancy, the depth charge had not been invented, anti-submarine detection methods were almost non-existent.

It is true that *Wilk*, a 1,000-ton ship, with a speed of nine knots under water and fourteen knots on the surface, was modern (she was built in France in 1929), but her very size was a drawback in that shallow water. She had all the advantage of the invention and the experience of the last war behind her design and building; but against that she had been at sea for fourteen days. For nine of those days she had been damaged; she had been harried and harassed by patrol boats, by aircraft, by destroyers through all that period. Her crew were on the near edge of exhaustion: and for encouragement she had only the tragic news that under the weight of the German onslaught Poland was falling. One by one the landmarks had gone, swallowed in the tide of the German advance.

Yet, when the order came, she moved down to the Baltic narrows, where between Bornholm and the Prussian shore the width drops to sixty miles. From there she passed to where, between Rügen and the Swedish coast, it drops to forty; and from there she turned up and essayed the narrows of the Sound.

And somewhere in the breathless confines of those narrows, with aircraft hunting across the shallow waters, with Germany defying all the rights of neutrals and of sanctuary, she headed blindly for the

Sound ; and, blindly moving under water, she groped her way to safety.

Through the Sound, out through the Kattegat, round the Skaw, and into the Skagerrak they ran ; and again they were harassed by German craft—surface craft and aircraft. But somehow they won clear, though forty-two depth charges were dropped, though every effort was made to get them. And in the fullness of time she came to England.

III

There was left the *Orzel*. *Orzel* and the other submarines had been in the Puck Bay between Hel and Gdynia in the first days of war. It had been the decision of the Polish Admiralty that the submarines should lie in the waters off the coast to guard against a thrust by the German heavy ships against Gdynia. The heavy ships kept clear ; the bombers and the anti-submarine craft made Puck Bay untenable.

On the 5th September a signal was made telling them to clear the Gulf of Danzig before nightfall and attack German warships and merchant vessels in the open Baltic. Even the Gulf of Danzig then was enemy waters. They were attacked by E-boats as they cleared the land. They were attacked by depth charges from the German bombers. The attacks became so insistent that *Orzel's* captain took his ship to the bottom and stayed there for two hours. In those two hours they heard ten charges explode in their vicinity. At nightfall they moved again, blind, below periscope depth, trying to get clear of those dangerous shallows. And even then they heard the scraping of wire cables against their hull—moored mines or sweeps.

They had no luck in the central Baltic. Germany, we know, had in those early days suspended for a little her Baltic trade ; her warships, save for those on the Danzig coast, were needed elsewhere. They found no targets. For six days they cruised without sighting a single man-of-war. And then on the sixth day their commanding officer was taken ill, and at the same time one of the most important pieces of equipment broke down. Desperately they tried to repair it, but it became evident rapidly that there was no hope of clearing the trouble at sea. For twenty-four hours they struggled to maintain their patrol. Then they made for Tallinn.

Esthonia was neutral. By international law a warship flying the flag of a belligerent power is entitled to call and to remain in a neutral port for four and twenty hours. Provided she can prove the necessity for repairs the period may at discretion be extended. As she berthed in Tallinn the *Orzel* was put under armed guard. This was in accordance with custom. Lieutenant-Commander Grudzinski interviewed the Esthonian authorities and was assured that normal international

obligations would be observed. Repairs to the instruments were thereupon begun.

At once the telegraph got to work. Esthonia, lying between the menace of Russia and the menace of Germany, was, with the little states to the southward of her—Latvia and Lithuania—in a position of extreme and dangerous delicacy. Though the direction of the blow was not yet known, its imminence was felt. When the great powers began to talk over the wires, Esthonia reconsidered her position.

The first symptom of the change was when the *Orzel* was informed that a German freighter in the harbour, s.s. *Talassa*, was about to sail; and since under international law there was an obligation to provide for her safety, *Orzel* would have to remain in port at least forty-eight hours. On the night of September 14th-15th *Talassa* put to sea.

Orzel had been berthed in the naval yard. She was, for practical purposes, surrounded by Esthonian naval craft, and officers of the small Esthonian Navy came aboard, ostensibly to supervise repairs—actually, as the situation developed, to reinforce the armed guard. On the morning of the 15th it became clear that Esthonia had submitted to *force majeure*, and that the Esthonian Government proposed to disarm and intern *Orzel*.

A hasty council was held in the tiny wardroom, and it was decided to destroy confidential documents and codes, and to make an attempt to run for it. Before the latter part of the plan could be implemented, the Esthonians acted. Armed parties descended on *Orzel*; ammunition, rifles, the breeches of guns, charts and other items of equipment were removed. Preparations were made to disembark the torpedoes.

While this was proceeding, while the officers of *Orzel* were bravely holding the fury of their men in check, the British Naval Attaché arrived at the quay-side to pay a courtesy visit. Esthonian guards refused him permission to board the ship, but he managed to hand over two visiting cards on which were written: "Good luck and God bless you." *Orzel's* people have said that that hurried gesture of friendliness was to them a reminder that, isolated, exiled, cut off from friends and country, there was still the weight and power of the Royal Navy at their backs.

On Sunday, September 17th, disarmed, but with six of the torpedoes still on board, they took a final decision to escape. Lieutenant-Commander Grudzinski, who had taken over the command, evolved an elaborate plan. It began when he himself cut through the cable of the torpedo hoist by which the remainder of the torpedoes were to have been lifted out. Having completed the job, he went on deck and began to bully the Esthonians for their carelessness in causing the cable to snap. His manner and his ingenuity had its reward. It was Sunday. To splice the wire cable was a long job. The Esthonians decided to put off the work until the morrow.

And then in the evening they learnt from the shore that Russia had invaded Poland from the east. They learnt that between the hammer of Germany's panzer divisions and the anvil of Russia there was no hope for their country. They knew that the end was in sight. It seems to have given them only a grim determination, a desperate fury of revenge.

Grudzinski fixed zero hour for midnight, but precisely at the hour the Esthonians sent down an officer to inspect the guard. The elaborate machinery of the plan was suspended even as it came into action. Breathlessly they waited while the inspection proceeded. For two hours of extreme tension they held their hand.

And then at two o'clock, when the flurry on the dock-side had quietened down, the signal was given. Four men, who had been ashore, came to the head of the steps. The Esthonian sentries were seized, gagged, and carried soundlessly down to the ship, and the working parties from *Orzel* went into swift, determined action. Her second-in-command, Lieutenant Piasecki, cut the cable leading to the nearest searchlight. Seamen severed the wire mooring cables. One of her officers cut the telephone wires. The engines started, and the *Orzel* edged away from the quay-side and headed for the entrance.

They had no charts. This was a foreign port. As they swung to clear the gates they ran on to shoals and grounded at the bows. Even as they grounded they heard the alarm bells clang into action on the Esthonian torpedo-boat that had lain close to their berth. They flooded the after tanks, blew the bow tanks, slid off, and squared again for the entrance. As they reached it the Esthonians opened fire—and here the wind and the sea themselves came to their aid. For the wind of the Baltic mouth, blowing across their stern, carried the thick smoke of the Diesel exhaust between them and the torpedo boat, fouling the range, hiding them for the precious seconds necessary to clear. The shells roared past them into the smoke and exploded, missing them by yards. Machine-gun and rifle bullets sang in the night, spattered against their casing, clanged on the armour of the conning tower. They suffered no hurt. In the roar of gunfire and the staccato rattle of small arms they cleared the entrance and got to sea.

Almost at once a searchlight from the shore picked them up; 6-inch batteries along the coast opened fire. As they crash-dived they heard 6-inch shells exploding in the water close to them. They headed north under water, and heard astern of them the thrash of propeller blades, the throb of engines, as small craft put out in pursuit. In a little the propellers were close to them; they heard the crash of depth charges, felt their vast concussion—but they got clear.

All the rest of that night they drove to the north, and gradually the thud and thunder of the pursuit fell astern of them, diminished, and

was lost. All the next day they remained submerged to throw off the aircraft that they knew must be searching every ripple of the water about them.

And at dusk, somewhere about the entrance to the Gulf of Finland, they came to the surface. Even then they could see searching warships on the horizon, but they were not themselves spotted. In the falling dark they headed for the west.

Still moving west on September 19th they picked up a B.B.C. news bulletin in Polish and heard that the Germans had alleged the murder of the sentries, but the sentries were still in *Orzel*, and alive and well. They were close to Gotland now, the great island of the central Baltic; and in the night they closed the shore to a distance of two miles, put out their collapsible boat, placed the Estonians in it, gave them food, "enough whisky to keep them drunk for a week," money to get them back to Estonia, and a letter to the Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Navy explaining the reasons for their escape and exonerating the sentries from all complicity. Then they gave them their course for the beaches, waited to make sure they reached the island, and put to sea again.

For sixteen days they carried on the patrol of the Baltic. The weather throughout most of that period was bad, low visibility, high, steep seas, heavy wind. They had no luck—neither German warship nor German merchantman was sighted in a sea that they describe as "desolate as the Arctic."

Slowly, over the wireless, they took in the news of Poland's fall. They heard of the gallantry of her armies, pushed back under the overwhelming weight of Germany, thrust at from behind by Russia; their air force destroyed, the ammunition supplies running swiftly lower and lower. They heard of the fall of Westerplatte, of Oksywie, and in the desperate end—of Hel.

And still they searched. There were six torpedoes in the tubes. They raked the whole Baltic for their target. But fuel was running out; their water had almost gone, for a week they had had none for shaving or for washing. In the end even the drinking water was almost done. They could have put into Sweden like the others—but they were not damaged; they could still keep the sea. They determined to make for England.

On October 7th they set their course for the Sound, hugging the coast of Sweden. Remember they had no charts. The Swedish coast, sown with small islands, studded with reefs, dangerous with shallows, with blinders and with pinnacle rocks, is one of the most difficult in the world to navigate. Great stretches have a depth of under three fathoms, barely enough to steam in, far too little in which to submerge.

Once again they were almost caught. German gunboats were

patrolling close to the Swedish shore. At night they worked with searchlights. Once the searchlight came to within a few yards of their stern, stopped, and trained away again.

They made the entrance to the Sound. *Wilk* had found the navigation of the Sound difficult: *Orzel* had no charts at all and drew even more water than *Wilk*. From memory her navigator had drawn a pencil sketch. The others had also searched their memories for lights, for buoys, for sea-marks. On these pencilled recollections hung the safety of the ship. It hung—and it remained. She went through on the surface; they dared not submerge. Her crew stayed on the deck with life-belts ready. It was Sunday. The waters of the Sound were almost clear of traffic. Luck stayed with them for a while, and then it became apparent they had been spotted. The water, by good fortune, here was deeper. They stopped engines, submerged, and lay for twenty hours on the bottom; and through almost all that time they heard above them the thrash of propeller blades as ships searched for their slender hull.

With the next darkness they came to the surface cautiously—and almost collided with their searchers. They did another crash-dive, came to the surface an hour later, and were caught by a searchlight. They were almost desperate now, and they determined to wait till dawn, to wait until they could see their enemy, to surface then and, fight it out. And when with the dawn they came to the air again, the sea was empty.

They came clear through the Skaggerak into a North Sea gale, and rolling and pitching in the grip of it, they reached the coast of England. On Saturday, October 14th, at 11 a.m., after forty-two hours of most desperate adventure, they sighted H.M.S. *Valorous* and answered the challenge with their name. Long since she had been written off as "lost."

There are sea deeds that speak more than words. Those of the *Orzel* are numbered among them. . . .

CHAPTER III

I

GROM, *Blyskawica* and *Burza* were the main strength of the Polish Navy. The decision to remove them from the Baltic before the outbreak of hostilities must be counted not least among the heroic decisions of this war. To take them from the Puck Bay, from the brief Polish coast, was to rob that coast of the major part of its protection. How well that decision was to justify itself in the wider war they could not know. What they did was done in blind faith in Britain and in the power of the British Navy.

In the voyage itself there was little that was of note. They passed through the Baltic without interference. In the Sound, close to the coast of Denmark, they sighted German light forces; but war had not yet been declared; there was no attack. As they slipped through the Skaggerak into the North Sea they were shadowed by German 'planes, but as dusk came on they headed north and then west; they lost the 'planes and were no more seen. And in the end they came to Leith in safety—and two of the most powerful destroyers in the world, ships of 2,100 tons with a speed of thirty-nine knots, and one other of 1,540 tons with a speed of thirty-three knots, also a most valuable ship, were added to the Allied forces.

There is one other point in that departure that reaches the standards of the heroic. It was told me unemotionally by an officer who had been in *Burza* at the time. He said: "When we opened our sealed orders we learnt that in the event of an attack by a strong force of German ships we in *Burza* were to fall behind and fight it out while the others went on. You see, they were much faster than us and much more valuable." He made no further comment; he seemed to have no comment to make—accepting this as formality.

From Rosyth the ships went down the coast to Plymouth, and on the way attacked a U-boat without definite result. From Plymouth they started patrol work about the south of Ireland, searching for U-boats. In between they did convoy escort runs and the dozen tasks that are the routine work of the handmaids of the Fleet.

As winter came they moved east and north again to the First Flotilla at Harwich under Captain Creasy of H.M.S. *Gipsy*. The Harwich Flotilla was the nearest fighting flotilla to the enemy, and that posting satisfied the ardent spirit of the Poles. They had in them one wish—to come "closer to the enemy." In a long series of patrols down the Belgian coast, in the narrow sand-guts off the coast of Holland, in the Heligoland Bight and through the banks and shallows of the North Sea, they swept endlessly throughout that winter, seeking out the enemy.

They were still at Harwich when the secret weapon—the magnetic mine—came to the peak of its brief fury. *Burza* was two hundred yards astern of the destroyer *Gipsy* when, in the very mouth of Harwich harbour, she ran over a magnetic mine and sank; and it was *Burza* who rescued most of her survivors.

The first aircraft torpedo attack of the war was made against *Blyskawica* and *Grom* early next morning over against the coast of Holland. That was the winter of the "phony" war. The men who served in the First Flotilla, the men who served at sea anywhere, have not called it "phony."

Slowly the winter passed, with the magnetic mine mastered, with air attack growing more frequent, with mining general all along the

east and southern coast. And in April the Poles were posted to Rosyth. With *Rodney* and *Valiant* they took part in the great sweeps in the Skaggerak that preceded the Norway invasion, and they were with the Fleet in the big attack in which *Gurkha* of the "Tribals" was sunk, when sixty 'planes attacked the big ships and the screen. And, as the storm broke over Norway, the three of them and *Tartar* brought the last convoy from Bergen. *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were known to be at sea off the Norwegian coast at that time, and for part of the way they came screened by the weight of the Home Fleet on the horizon. From Rosyth they went to Scapa, and from Scapa on April 19th they were ordered to proceed to Narvik.

All these eight months they had kept together—working first at Plymouth, then at Harwich, then at Rosyth, as units of the same flotillas, carrying out the same operations, facing the same dangers. The Admiralty had realised the desirability of unity. These destroyers and the two submarines were, for that time, Poland—all of Poland that was left, all of Poland that was fighting still. Now, in the wild complex and tangle of the Norwegian fighting, they were separated for the first time.

II

They left Scapa together on the 19th, escorting a convoy for the Norwegian coast, but on the 20th, in heavy weather, *Bursa* was ordered to return to the Flow. The others went on. At noon the same day they were attacked by a U-boat. A torpedo exploded close to *Blyskawica* and the following day her crew were grimly interested to hear the German news service announcing the sinking of a Polish destroyer eastward of the Shetlands.

On April 21st they reached the Norwegian coast, turned up the Vestfjord, and off Skjelfjord were detached in order to proceed to Narvik. But a little down the fjord from Narvik the order was countermanded, and they returned to Skjel to refuel. They had a brief rest, refuelled, and on April 24th plunged into the confused, fantastic battle of the fjords.

Blyskawica went in first, passing a British cruiser that was shelling Narvik intermittently. She closed to 4,000 metres and began methodically to shell the railway bridges running from the town along the coast of Rombaksfjord. In the afternoon she plastered her sector again with fire from her main armament, smashing the railway track between the tunnels.

In the evening of the 25th her patrol was taken over by a British destroyer, and she returned to refuel, coming back to the attack later in the night—the night that was almost as brilliant as noon. During this day she sighted gun emplacements on the hill between the town

and the harbour and, after an hour's shelling at a range of 2,000 metres, destroyed them.

On the 27th she was patrolling at the mouth of Rombaksfjord, and in the afternoon destroyed a party of thirty to forty men hauling sleighs near the railway tracks. Immediately after this she destroyed a culvert between two railway embankments.

On the 28th she was patrolling in the same area again, but with evening she moved to the coast of the island of Baroy, west of Narvik. On the 29th she proceeded to Skjel, her fuel almost exhausted, and *Grom* took over her patrol of the Baroy area. Before she had completed her refuelling—they worked the destroyers of the Norwegian coast most desperately hard—she was ordered to proceed to Salfjord to examine a reported dropping of parachutists and the presence of enemy ships. The following day a landing was made by British troops at Salfjord, and during the operation she gave cover.

Curiously she seems to have had a remarkable degree of immunity from air attacks during these first days. Not until the morning of May 2nd, when she had left Skjel once again to proceed to Narvik, did she suffer her first attack. Then, as she was approaching Baroy she heard aircraft engines in the distance, and immediately afterwards bombs exploded nearly a mile astern. There was a low cloud ceiling and she never sighted the plane. Zigzagging, she proceeded to her appointed position.

At noon she entered the harbour at Narvik and went back to her old position off the Rombaksfjord. In the middle of the afternoon she shelled a formation of several hundred German troops proceeding from the direction of the town along the railway track, and caused very heavy casualties.

Her work and that of the other destroyers was by this time infuriating the German garrison so much that improvised batteries were brought into use against them. That evening, when the ship was about a mile from the coast, abreast of the upper channel, she was suddenly shelled by anti-tank guns and heavy machine-guns. She immediately returned the fire, and the new gun positions were destroyed. She, however, was hit four times, three shells piercing the skin plating of the port side and exploding in the engine-room, causing damage to one boiler and steam-pipes. On reporting her damage and casualties she was ordered to proceed to Skjelfjord to repair with the assistance of the depot ship, and she was replaced on patrol by *Grom*. Before leaving for Skjel she went alongside *Grom* to report on the situation. This was at about midnight on May 2nd, the eve of Poland's National Day.

Grom made one patrol of Rombaksfjord, lay off the entrance for a little, and about 4 a.m. went in again. When she had proceeded up the fjord for about five minutes she was hit on the side by a 75 mm.

shell, which damaged an oil-tank and one of the boilers. From the smoke it was apparent that the guns were mounted in positions concealed by houses on the shore. Systematically *Grom* began to bombard the area, and succeeded in destroying the 75 mm. gun which had hit her and two anti-tank guns.

During this period a number of air raids came in over the area, but she was not attacked, though her crew were almost constantly at anti-aircraft stations.

That night she lay off the entrance of Rombaksfjord observing enemy movements, and in the early morning of May 4th located two new gun emplacements together with barbed wire entanglements and trenches occupied by German troops. She began to cross over the fjord to take up a bombarding position. Shortly after 8 a.m. enemy aircraft were seen in the vicinity. Two enemy bombers were sighted at a height of 8,400 feet; these did not attack.

Almost immediately afterwards, however, a third 'plane was sighted at a height of 16,750 feet. To hit a moving ship deliberately from that height is almost impossible. The experience of hundreds of air raids in this war, the dropping of thousands of bombs, have proved that from extreme heights even big ships—battleships, aircraft-carriers and the like—are relatively immune. Yet, by the freakish chance of war, *Grom* was hit. A single stick of six bombs dropped from this one 'plane fell directly athwart her as she moved over the still waters of the fjord. Two bombs hit—one of them on the torpedo casing, exploding the compressed air reservoir, one on the side of the ship. A cloud of steam enveloped the whole of the after portion.

For a moment *Grom* hung steady, moving ahead. Then she heeled violently to starboard, and her captain on the bridge gave the order to abandon ship. She sank with extraordinary rapidity. There was no time to do anything more than get three rafts away; no time even to attempt the lowering of boats. Yet there was time for her men, gathered on the fo'c'sle and on the stern, with the ship breaking beneath their feet and the list increasing with the wild swiftness of a nightmare, to ask before they jumped, "Has the order to abandon ship been given?"

One officer, who was below when the bomb hit but managed to get on deck to his "abandon ship" position on the raft amidships, describes how he got clear:

After that I remember only my frantic efforts to keep swimming in the icy water, to keep afloat without getting frozen to the bone.

The vast, red, graceful stern of the ship was now reared up vertically. The bows, completely separated, were also standing out of the water. Then the two portions began to approach each other like the jaws of a monstrous pair of pincers. They closed with a terrifying crash, and a moment later everything had disappeared.

The waters of Narvikfjord were very cold ; there was ice in the shallows. Many men died in the first explosions : many others died in that cold, in the smothering oil fuel, the reek of gas and fumes.

But the disaster to the *Grom* had been sighted by British vessels working in company down the fjord. *Aurora*, *Faulknor* and *Bedouin* came racing in to her assistance. Boats from the three ships picked up the survivors. One officer and fifty-eight seamen were killed ; one officer and twenty-three were wounded. A third of Poland's Navy was gone ; its heaviest ship in four brief minutes was wiped out of existence. The Navy of Poland had suffered its first great tragedy.

III

Burza had left the little flotilla of three on April 20th, and returned to Scapa. On April 26th she left Scapa a second time for Narvik, convoying, together with a British destroyer, three transports. In a black gale on the 29th she reached the Lofotens, and during that night one of the convoyed ships—this was a large part of the perils of that fantastic coast—ran on a hidden blinder. *Burza* stood off the wrecked ship—she was a tanker—and examined the position. As after various attempts it proved impossible to get her off, she removed captain and crew and rejoined the convoy.

Later she was sent back to examine the position a second time. As she reached there she found that the tanker had capsized, and almost as she arrived a violent explosion took place. The oil of the tanker's cargo had caught fire.

From the wreck she went to Harstadt, dropped her involuntary passengers, and on May 2nd took a party of R.A.F. officers and an officer of the Norwegian Navy to Sjoenvfjord and Rejsenfjord to explore the terrain with a view to finding emergency aerodromes. On May 3rd she went to Skaalandfjord to tow landing craft with French Alpine troops to Gratangen. Having completed that task she returned to Harstadt.

On the morning of May 4th she was lying in harbour at Harstadt, and to her came Admiral the Earl of Cork and Orrery, Commander-in-Chief of the operations along the Norwegian coast. This, however, was no Admiral's inspection. He came very simply as a sailor amongst seamen to tell them of the loss of the *Grom*—to tell them of her work and of her ending. And later in the day, by his orders, she proceeded to H.M.S. *Resolution* to take off the survivors.

There are many links between the Navy of Poland and the Royal Navy of Britain. They are links that have been forged in the hard comradeship of arms, in the endless work of patrol, of convoy and of battle. Throughout their alliance a curious and undeviating tact seems to have informed not only the Admiralty, but the officers and

men of the Royal Navy in its dealings with this navy-in-exile. The keeping of the ships together in the first months of the war was perhaps the first expression of this; the Admiral's personal voicing of the news was another: the greatest of all was in the transfer of the *Grom's* survivors.

As I was told the story by men who took part in it, it had a strange emotional quality. Even after three years—three years of hard fighting and bitter war—these men remember poignantly that brief scene.

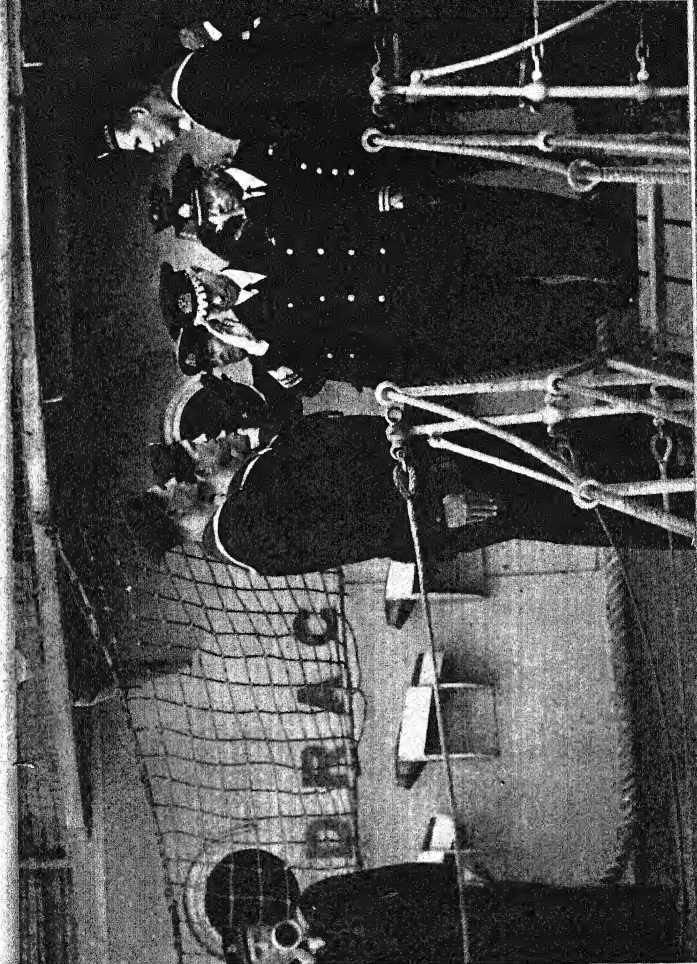
They steamed towards the rendezvous, they told me, over fjords as still as the glass of a brilliant mirror. Snow bank and rock, the stunted trees, little houses on the shore, hung in that water in utter clarity. *Resolution* was lying in a small fjord that made the only harbour, and as they came past the headland that opened on the fjord, they saw her bulk, grey and enormous, stretched across the water.

They called her by Aldis lamp, asking for permission to come alongside, and swiftly the answer came in the affirmative. Slowly they headed up out of the main waterway into the anchorage. And, as they approached the great ship lying there under the mountains, they heard suddenly the clamour of the bugle sounding the alarm, and in the same instant a wave of German bombers came over the crests of the hills. The winking light on *Resolution's* bridge passed a swift message: "Negative permission to come alongside."

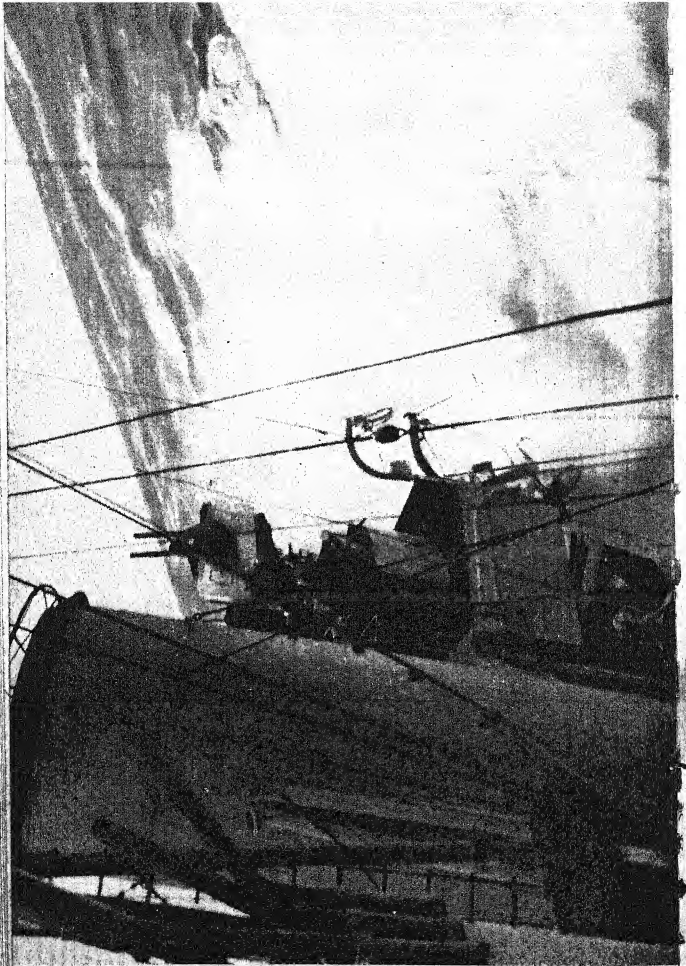
As they swung away the anti-aircraft guns on *Resolution* went into action, the sky was pock-marked with the smoke of anti-aircraft shell bursts, the stillness of the fjord was shaken with the deep thunder of the guns, the air itself shuddered with the answering shell-bursts. And across that rolling thunder they heard the shrill, harsh whistle of the falling bombs. Their own guns went into action as they saw across that peaceful water the monstrous uprising of the bursts. "Tribal" destroyers in the anchorage were firing too as the second wave of 'planes came in. The whole air seemed to pulsate with sound, a vicious, frenetic fury. Then the last of the 'planes dropped its load and missed as had its predecessors. The noise of the firing ceased. The last shells burst with deep, staccato thuds. Stillness came back to the fjord with the noise of the 'planes dying in a faint decrescendo beyond the hills.

And on *Resolution's* bridge the light winked again "permission to go alongside." They went up to her, watching, as the water lane between the ships diminished, the men upon her decks, searching for friends, for brothers, for kinsmen. They knew only that many brave men had gone with *Grom*: they could not know the names. And now, as the ships came nearer, they could see this one present and that one missing.

And then as they came alongside, with the anti-aircraft guns' crews standing by the still-smoking guns, under the great 15-inch turret of



Vice-Admiral Swirski leaving O.R.P. "Dragon," heaviest ship of the new Polish Navy.



A Polish destroyer at sea : O.R.P. "Krakowiak" in a heavy gale.

her main armament, the Marine band on *Resolution* broke into the magnificence of Poland's national anthem. There is no man of *Burza's* crew who will forget that moment.

Swiftly the work of transfer went on. The unwounded men came across, and then the stretcher cases; and as each stretcher went over the side the officers of *Resolution* saluted its passing. Then, when the last man had gone and as the ships were casting off, the band played "God Save the King."

Burza went ahead and opened out the water. Along *Resolution's* rail, watching the departure, clustered the men of the watch below, men who were not needed at the guns; and now, simultaneously, without direction, they began to sing. The song was banal; musically it was without significance—and yet it was a song of the comradeship of war; it was a song that expressed in a way that no compliments, no passage of fulsome signals, no Orders of the Day could possibly have expressed, the feeling that the men of *Resolution* had for the men of these two little ships, one gone now in the struggle that belonged to all. They sang "Roll Out The Barrel." And as *Burza* went down the fjord the song continued, growing softer and more sad across the waters.

And then, before it was ended, they heard the alarm again. A fresh wave of German bombers came across the hills, and once again the guns took up the story.

IV

Blyskawica had taken *Grom's* place on the Rombaksfjord patrol. In the first hours of her duty she passed through a great oil slick; pieces of burned wood floated in it—this was the last of *Grom*.

Once again she took up the job of clearing up the guns that came into action from time to time along the steep sides of the fjord, of shelling German working parties and German entrenchments as they were spotted. In one burst she was hit eleven times by light shells or splinters directed mainly at the bridge and superstructure.

On May 6th there was considerable activity amongst the enemy 'planes, and she could see supplies being dropped by parachute to the troops. A little after 8 a.m. she was attacked by an enemy bomber which dropped eight bombs on her starboard side. Shortly after, the 'plane came in a second time, bombs falling about 300 yards away. Immediately after the second stick of bombs was dropped the 'plane went into a steep dive. A moment later a parachute came clear of it and opened, and the 'plane itself went into a spin and crashed into the fjord.

At nine o'clock there was a new attack; at ten o'clock another. For over two hours there was a long series of attacks, sometimes by one,

sometimes by two 'planes simultaneously. In the afternoon there were fresh attacks. Altogether more than fifty bombs were dropped in the near vicinity of the ship during this day. The difficulties of taking avoiding action in these narrow waters are tremendous ; yet by admirable handling and by the brilliant work of her anti-aircraft guns, she kept free of trouble.

On May 6th she went to Tjeldsundet.

Meanwhile *Burza*, having transhipped the survivors to a hospital ship, now went back to her and took off the unwounded men and the slightly wounded, and transferred them to a troopship that was due to leave for Britain. During this transshipment a bombing attack was made on the hospital ship.

On the 7th she went to Harstadt and took aboard the staff of General Bethune. At midnight she went up to Narvik to examine the terrain. A precise survey of the area was made and photographs taken of the main German positions. On the 8th she returned to Harstadt.

Blyskavica had gone back to Harstadt, and to her as well came Admiral the Earl of Cork and Orrery to express "our appreciation and admiration for the manner in which—during our common service—you performed the task imposed on you. I am very grieved," he said, "by the loss of *Grom*, but I hope that very soon the rescued crew will man a new ship, who will be able to fight."

Blyskavica was ordered to proceed to Skjelfjord, and from thence to assist in the escorting of a convoy to Britain. The destroyer and the convoy were delayed by bad weather, however, and they lay in Skjel for several days.

On the 10th May there was again one of those periods of intense air activity that marked all the Norwegian operations. From 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. a number of 'planes appeared in the vicinity of the anchorage, but did not attack. At noon, however, a high-flying 'plane circled the harbour and finally made a bombing run across the anchored ships. Bombs fell some considerable distance from *Blyskavica*. A few minutes later the 'plane made a second attack: the bombs fell astern of a British cruiser. When the 'plane came back for a third run she was caught by *Blyskavica's* anti-aircraft fire and hit. Large fragments of the wings broke off and were seen to fall slowly down. The 'plane lost height, and eventually crashed in the next fjord. Successive attacks took place throughout the morning, but no ships were hit.

On the evening of May 10th the convoy orders were cancelled.

Burza at this time had been enduring much the same sort of thing at Harstadt. On the 8th May Harstadt was bombed six times and two sticks of bombs fell near the ship. The same day she picked up two airmen from a British fighter. On May 9th she found in Gratangenfjord two French officers who had lost touch with their units, but were still holding prisoner a German spy.

On May 10th she was ordered to join a British destroyer and *Blyskawica* in Vestfjord. The three ships went down the fjord in a heavy gale, and on May 12th anchored at Scapa Flow.

The Norwegian adventure was over. Poland had lost a third of her Navy. She had established anew her reputation for courage, for efficiency and for fighting spirit.

It is one of the odd coincidences of the war that as *Grom* sank, H.M.S. *Garland* was lent to the Polish Government. The transfer had been arranged some time previously, the date fixed. It was the accident of fortune that *Grom* should have been lost simultaneously. *Garland* was at this time at Malta—very far from the hard fighting of the Norwegian fjords.

V

From Scapa *Blyskawica* and *Burza* went down to Harwich to their old base for a short spell.

The swift sequence of the disastrous Spring of 1940 was in full spate along the Continent. Norway was falling in the north; Denmark had gone; on the 10th May Holland was invaded. Bitterly her small army contested the path of the enemy without and within. *Burza* came south from Scapa through the straggling hegebra of floating Holland, through ships that were being towed across and coastal vessels escaping, pilot boats and tugs, liners and fishing vessels. She went to Harwich and there *Blyskawica* joined her three days later, and they completed with stores, ammunition and fuel. They made good the small hurts of the Norwegian campaign, and got their breath for a second throw.

The tragedy of Belgium was moving swiftly too. The French armies had broken. The British Expeditionary Force was cut off by the great thrust that reached down from the bridges of the Meuse and across half northern France to Abbeville on the Channel coast.

On May 24th, after carrying out patrols off the Aldeburgh light, *Burza* was ordered to proceed at full speed to Dover.

The situation along the Channel coast had passed from stringency to disaster. By the coast roads the Germans were coming up from Abbeville to Étapes, from Étapes to Boulogne, from Boulogne to Calais, from Calais—Down through the narrowing wedge the B.E.F. and the French armies of the north were fighting their way to the sea. North-west and east the Belgian armies had reached the coast and, ammunitionless and almost weaponless, were near the breaking point. But Calais was still holding.

At Dover *Burza* was ordered to proceed immediately to Calais to join the force of destroyers off the port. At four o'clock she joined two British ships, under H.M.S. *Vimiera*, near the entrance to Calais

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harbour, and reported having sighted on the road over the Sangatte hills a column of motorised troops, probably German. There was considerable dog-fighting overhead and a large number of Allied and German 'planes manœuvring up and down the coast. Standing to anti-aircraft action stations, they went in to the bombardment, opening fire at a range of 4,200 metres. Simultaneously they opened fire on a close formation of German bombers. As the 'planes came in to attack, the formation broken by the anti-aircraft fire, they changed course, zig-zagging at speed. The leading British destroyer was attacked by three flights, *Burza* by five. After they had dropped their bombs, the 'planes machine-gunned the ship.

The second flight dropped their bombs from a height of 1,400 feet. The first stick fell astern at a distance of less than fifteen feet. Other sticks fell on either side at distances varying from fifty to thirty feet. Wave after wave of 'planes came in. More than fifty heavy bombs fell close to the ship, and there were in addition a large number of smaller ones. But it was not until the last stick of heavy bombs dropped that *Burza*, still firing all her light weapons, was hit. Two bombs fell very close to her bows causing serious damage, and a near miss also caused some damage to her superstructure.

One 'plane was hit, set on fire, and crashed about 3,000 yards from the ship; and a second 'plane hit, stalled, and was caught by the water-splash from her own bombs and crashed.

The attack lasted for about fifteen minutes. But at the end of it *Burza* was still afloat, and only one seaman of her crew was seriously wounded. She was, however, stopped, and the bombardment of the coast was broken off.

An examination of the damage showed her commander that it was impossible to continue the action as she could do no more than three or four knots stern first, and the strong tide-race off Calais harbour precluded any possibility of her remaining in the vicinity. One of the British destroyers accompanying her was sunk during this action, but as her survivors had been picked up by one of the others, *Burza* headed for Dover. Crawling slowly across the Channel that she had raced over only an hour or two before, *Burza* got back to Dover, her bows smashed in, her upper works damaged, her engine-room considerably shaken. The following day she was towed stern first to Portsmouth.

Grom was sunk; *Burza* was out of action. The Navy of Poland was perilously reduced. There remained *Blyskawica*.

On May 26th she was on patrol off the British coast in the latitude of Yarmouth. At dark, even from that distance, she could see the red glare of Dunkirk. On May 27th she was ordered south, and, with a British destroyer, commenced a patrol along the line of the Dunkirk evacuations.

This was in the opening stages of the great drama of Dunkirk, but

already upon the water were the strange flotillas of the miracle. Over Dunkirk and Calais the great smoke clouds had mounted. At dusk the fires stretched from Boulogne to Nieuport.

That night *Blyskawica* received orders to proceed to Dunkirk together with two British destroyers. At midnight they approached the Mole. Dunkirk was burning even then. A heavy bombing attack was in progress, and one 'plane detached itself and, dropping to less than 1,000 feet, opened fire with machine-guns and swept *Blyskawica's* deck with bullets. She opened fire in turn, and the 'plane crashed shortly afterwards.

Meanwhile she had put her boats in the water in obedience to instructions. At 1.45 a.m. this instruction was cancelled, and she was ordered to return and patrol in the vicinity of the North Goodwin light vessel.

Throughout the 28th she worked the area about the North Goodwin, and once again watched the strange procession of overloaded ships coming home from the Dunkirk beaches.

On May 29th in line ahead with a formation of British destroyers, she saw the leading destroyer make a sudden emergency turn to starboard, and between the wake of the next ahead and her own bow they saw from *Blyskawica's* bridge the track of a torpedo. With her companion she carried out a depth charge attack and circled, coming in for fresh attack. Immediately they heard the roar of aircraft engines, and from the low cloud a German bomber came in, diving on *Blyskawica*. She followed the bombs with machine-gunning, and slipped back into the clouds, getting clear.

Some minutes later a periscope was observed in line with the West Hinder buoy. Both ships attacked again, *Blyskawica* dropping six depth charges. Five British 'planes came in and joined in the search, but without result. After some while the patrol was resumed, and about 5 p.m. she was picked up by a four-engined Junkers bomber. Ten minutes later there was another attack.

In the early evening she found the British destroyer *Greyhound* proceeding in the direction of the English coast at slow speed, heavily damaged by bombs. *Blyskawica* took her in tow and towed her as far as the North Goodwin lightship. Then, as the tugs asked for had not made their appearance, she took her on to Dover.

At midnight two German 'planes appeared; magnetic mines were dropped by parachute about 3,000 yards from the ship.

Having got her cripple safely to Dover, she returned to patrol.

So the incredible, breathless story of the evacuation went on. Few men have any exact memories of those days. They passed in a wild turmoil of bombing, machine-gunning, artillery fire, strange patrols; of rescue work, towing, searching, helping.

In the early morning of the 31st she had a brush with a German

E-boat, and a heavy explosion took place close to her bows. In the darkness she began a wild search, and after some while there was another heavy explosion some distance off, and a column of flame. A little while after she heard the noise of the E-boat again, and, sighting her, opened fire. Soon after they saw lights in the water and, steaming towards them, found the survivors of the French destroyer *Sirocco*, which had been torpedoed by a German E-boat. They rescued one officer and fourteen ratings.

At midday of June 1st she received orders to return to Harwich. Dunkirk, for her, was over.

But her work was not by any means over. It is not easy to tabulate the tasks of a destroyer, nor is it possible at this stage of the war to give in detail all the record of a ship. But the record of the first year of *Blyskawica's* service with the British Navy—remember this included nine months of what has been called the “phony” war—is available. In that period she took part in :

- 27 offensive operations
- 1 naval battle
- 23 convoys
- 3 actions with enemy shore batteries
- 56 patrols
- 17 engagements with enemy surface craft
- 13 engagements with enemy submarines
- 56 attacks by enemy aircraft.

VI

Meanwhile there had been a new tragedy for the little Navy of the exiles. *Orzel* somewhere about this time—the exact date is not known—had gone.

Ever since repairs had been completed to *Wilk* and to herself after the heroic escape from the Baltic, they had taken their part in the North Sea patrols. On April 8th *Orzel*, lying under water off the Norwegian coast, observed an increasing activity amongst German aircraft. They were flying close to the Norwegian shore, and on a number of occasions were fired at by the Norwegian coastal batteries. War had not yet been declared; the bands had not yet marched into Oslo—but the air was heavy with tension.

And while she lay there, about 10.30 a.m. on the morning of the 8th she sighted a ship sailing without colours. She increased speed to examine her, and eventually established that she was the *Rio de Janeiro* of Hamburg—German, 9,800 tons, built for the South American passenger trade and for the expensive freights, cotton, coffee and so forth. She was heading north.

In those days we still observed, despite Germany's absolute disregard,

the law of nations at sea with respect to merchant vessels. *Orzel* surfaced and signalled to the *Rio de Janeiro* to stop and to send her captain to the submarine with the ship's papers.

The German increased speed, heading for Norwegian territorial waters. *Orzel* increased speed to match and fired a machine-gun across the bows of the liner. The captain of the *Rio de Janeiro* stopped his ship then, and began to lower a boat. After a moment or two it became obvious that he was deliberately adopting time-wasting tactics while sending out messages for aircraft support. The boat took an intolerable time to reach the water. Then her crew was unable to row her more than a hundred and fifty yards from the ship, and all the while the *Rio de Janeiro's* wireless was calling . . .

Orzel's captain signalled again: "Abandon ship. In five minutes I torpedo." *Rio de Janeiro* acknowledged the signal, but took no further steps. Precisely five minutes after the signal *Orzel* fired her first torpedo, hitting the *Rio de Janeiro* amidships. Instantly the ship's empty decks became crowded with men in uniform; men jumping into the water; heaving over boards, pieces of wood, benches, anything that would float—men in military uniform. It was obvious that the *Rio de Janeiro* was heavily laden with German troops, that she was part of the preliminary invasion force that was to paralyse the Norwegian ports.

She sank slowly and *Orzel*, seeing 'planes approaching on the horizon, determined to make a second attack and finish things off. Moving round to the opposite side, she put in a second torpedo at very close range. This apparently exploded the ammunition store. There was a violent shock, the ship broke in two and sank immediately, leaving the water covered with swimming soldiers in field grey.

On the same patrol *Orzel* attacked a German patrol vessel. Though she heard the torpedoes explode, she was unable to observe the results as she was being attacked by German 'planes at the time.

Meanwhile *Wilk* was also carrying out successful patrols in enemy waters. In April she was working in the North Sea when there happened one of those fantastic accidents of fortune. For, moving blind, viewless, and unseen, she rammed a German submarine. They had picked her up a little before on the hydrophones, but the collision itself was in the gift of fortune. They met her square, their bows against her side, and the two ships sank for a little, locked. Then *Wilk* got clear and carried on. They never saw their enemy. They believe only that she sank, torn open in that blind encounter of the under-sea. Immediately after they were caught by surface craft. In prolonged and vicious attacks forty-five depth charges were dropped, and *Wilk* suffered considerable damage. But she remained submerged, and gradually the assault slackened and died away. For twenty hours she lay on the sea-bottom. When she rose again the sea was empty.

On May 23rd *Orzel* left a British port on a fresh patrol into the waters of the Skaggerak that she knew so bitterly and so well. From that patrol she did not return. Those who worked with her, those who knew her men, know that they died as they had wished—in battle in the very waters of the enemy.

Throughout the days of the disasters, from Norway by Calais to the Moles of Dunkirk, the Polish Navy had carried its share of the burden : it had borne its share also of the loss—and the loss to the Allies in that period had been very heavy. Of the First Flotilla with which they had worked so long, *Burza* and *Blyskawica* were almost the last survivors. Ten ships out of the thirteen of the original force were gone. Only *Griffin* besides themselves remained.

CHAPTER IV

I

FROM the submarine attacks in the Skaggerak, that were the prelude to the Norwegian campaign, to the evacuations from Bordeaux, the battle of the coast of Europe was essentially a little ship battle. It is true that at Narvik *Warspite* had gone in with the destroyers, that *Renown* had been in action with *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, that we had lost *Glorious*, that cruisers had taken their part in the bombardments up and down the narrow fjords of Norway—but the burden and the bulk of the work had been carried on the shoulders of the destroyers ; and the tally of ships lost and of ships damaged was a grievous one.

At Dunkirk alone Britain lost six destroyers, while France lost seven. In the week after Dunkirk there were seventy destroyers undergoing urgent repairs in British dockyards. From Narvik inside the Arctic Circle, down the North Sea, on the coast of Holland in the Scheldt, along the shallows past Dunkirk to Calais Roads, to Boulogne and down through the Channel to the open sea, we lost drifters, torpedo boats, minesweepers, sloops, old destroyers and new—the battle of the coast of France was a holocaust of little ships.

And in that battle the Polish Navy had lost one destroyer, its largest and newest, the *Grom* ; one submarine, the magnificent *Orzel*. *Burza* was in dock at Portsmouth with her bows blown off ; *Blyskawica* was lying alongside with repair crews swarming over her. Only *Wilk* of the Home ships was left afloat—*Wilk* and *Garland*, the new addition in the Mediterranean.

The Polish Navy was down : it was by no means out. The story of its regeneration after Dunkirk is as magnificent as the story of the days

which preceded it. When the ships left Poland they carried only their normal war-time complements. There were no reserves of men, no areas of recruitment. Yet somehow they had already begun to rebuild personnel. Out of volunteers in the Polish Legion in France, soldiers these, they had made sailors. From the ships of their Merchant Navy on the outer seas they had drawn in fresh men. From America, from Canada, from other parts of the Empire, emigrant Poles had volunteered. They had been able to create a new crew to man the *Garland*, and these men had gone out in transport aircraft to Malta, and had changed the flags in the deep intricacies of Valetta harbour. Now they went ahead again to replace *Grom* and *Orzel*.

In peace the Polish Naval College was at Bydgoszcz, where it had been transferred in 1938 from Torun. The course there, as at Torun, lasted for three years, and a considerable training cruise was provided during that period. When war broke out in 1939 this cruise was in progress.

In May of 1939 the training schooner *Iskra* had sailed from Gdynia with a full complement of midshipmen of the youngest class for a long voyage through the Mediterranean. The naval transport *Wilia* shortly afterwards had left also for the Mediterranean with the second portion of the course. In *Wilia* engineering instruction was given.

These ships were actually in the Mediterranean when the German attack was launched, and were ordered to pass through the Straits of Gibraltar and wait at Casablanca on the Moroccan coast until the situation clarified. For some considerable while the ships remained at Casablanca. Finally, by agreement with the British Admiralty, they were brought to Britain, and the naval course was reopened in the ship *Gdynia* in one of the principal British naval bases.

Despite the enormous difficulties of carrying on classes largely without text-books and in a strange country, the course was completed, and at the final examination showed very remarkable results. Under the stimulus of war the midshipmen had attained a standard considerably higher than the average. They were drafted to vessels of the Royal Navy to complete their sea time, and a nucleus of new officers essential to the growing Polish Navy was established.

Meanwhile from all over the world reservist officers and men of the Polish Navy, exiled in foreign countries, had by one means or another reached France or England. Some had come working their passage in merchant vessels, some had found official transport. To the seven hundred veterans of the escape were added a hundred and fifty from *Iskra* and *Wilia*. In the first three years of the war two hundred more escaped from Poland by fantastic methods—some of them crossed Europe, some of them crossed the world. Three hundred came from the Polish Legion in France, two hundred from the Polish Army in

England, a hundred from North America, a hundred from South America, something like a thousand eventually from Russia. The man-power problem was in a large measure solved.

In the months to come they manned one ship after another as new material became available. H.M.S. *Nerissa*, one of the heavy destroyers of the post-"Tribal" class, was lent to the Polish Navy following the promise made immediately on the sinking of the *Grom* that the Royal Navy would replace that gallant ship. She was renamed *Piorun*. She joined *Garland*, already taken over at Malta. Then, as "Hunt" class destroyers became available in increasing numbers, the Polish Navy received three—*Kujawiak*, *Slazak* and *Krakowiak*. To replace *Orzel* came the *Sokol*. Later still came the ex-American submarine *Jastrzab*, and she was joined in due course by *Dzik*. And there came too, in the fullness of time, motor torpedo-boats.

II

There is no break in the continuity of work though *Burza* and *Blyskawica* remained in dockyard hands until almost the middle of August, for, while they lay under the thunder of riveters against the dockyard walls, *Garland* was carrying the flag brilliantly in the Mediterranean. On May 3rd the Polish national flag was hoisted for the first time—a splendid celebration of the National Day.

Garland was a destroyer of the British "Greyhound" class, completed in 1936, with a tonnage of 1,350, four 4.7-inch guns and eight torpedo tubes. She had a speed of 36.5 knots and carried a complement of a hundred and forty-five. Already she had established a reputation for herself under the White Ensign, and the Polish Government asked if, in consideration of her record, they might retain the name under which she had been launched to fight for Britain.

By July 1st her Polish crew had taken part in their first engagement, one of those many fleeting brushes with the fleeing Italians that were the mark of all the first section of the Mediterranean campaign. Working in the great area of the eastern basin—Malta to the Dardanelles, Haifa, Alexandria and the Libyan coast—she took part in all the operations of Admiral Cunningham's force. She was with the destroyer screen when *Sydney* sank the *Bartolomeo Colleoni* on July 19th. *Sydney*, accompanied by a small force of destroyers, made contact with two Italian cruisers of the "Colleoni" class (which was alleged to be capable of 40.9 knots), and by superb gunnery sank the name ship of the class in a brisk and brief engagement. The second ship, however, escaped despite further excellent gunnery on *Sydney's* part.

Garland was with Admiral Cunningham again in the action off Calabria earlier in the month when his Fleet, making contact with the

enemy north-east of Malta, chased it at high speed into the Straits of Messina, sinking the destroyer *Espero* in the course of the action.

Garland covered convoys between Haifa and Alexandria, between Port Said and Malta; she worked off the coast of Greece when Italy attempted the invasion of that most gallant country; and she achieved for herself a reputation to match those of the old ships of the Polish Navy in the waters of the British Isles. Then in August of 1940 she came through the Mediterranean, past Malta to Gibraltar, and in the Sicilian Channel she was heavily attacked by a strong formation of Italian 'planes. She escaped without damage.

Burza, with her new bow, and *Blyskawica* completed repairs about the middle of August, and headed north for general duties. Before the month was out *Blyskawica* had made an attack on an enemy submarine while covering a convoy of fifty-one vessels. For almost a month they worked on the Atlantic convoy. Then in September they returned to Plymouth.

On September 3rd *Garland*, with her laurels fresh upon her, arrived from the Mediterranean. Once again there were three Polish destroyers together in British waters.

On September 23rd they took part in an offensive sweep that covered the French coast in the area of Brest, and, in the course of that sweep, *Blyskawica* took off the crew of a French cutter and sank the ship.

On October 9th the three ships sailed from Plymouth to take part in the bombardment of Cherbourg. With *Revenge*, *Manchester* and the Fifth Destroyer Flotilla, under Lord Louis Mountbatten, they covered the heavy ships across to the bombardment positions. Polish and British motor torpedo-boats went with the force as an extended screen, and, late on the night of the 9th, the force plastered harbour works, oil installations and shipping in the harbour of Cherbourg with salvo after salvo of shells. Though German light forces were known to be in the area, no attack was made on the Allies and the destroyers had no enemy to fight.

Towards the end of the same month they moved to Scotland and, joined eventually by *Piorun*, they formed the Clyde escort group of four destroyers covering the approach and departure of convoys in the north-western area at the very height and fury of the battle of the Atlantic.

On Saturday, October 26th, the ships of the group were covering a convoy to the westward of Ireland when the *Empress of Britain*, about a hundred and fifty miles off the coast, was attacked by a Focke-Wulf 'plane, hit and set on fire by bombs. *Burza* was detached to go to her assistance, and sighted a pall of smoke above the horizon somewhere about two o'clock. At three o'clock she came alongside—the first naval vessel on the scene—and immediately began taking on board survivors and wounded. For her brilliant work in this connection she

was presented with a special diploma of thanks by the Canadian Pacific Company.

For months the work of escort—the patient, incessant vigilance of the Atlantic—continued. There were attacks on enemy submarines. They fought off Focke-Wulf assaults. There were false alarms of raiders and of German heavy ships.

Figures cannot convey the full meaning, but there is one figure that can be given and that must convey even to the uninitiate the superb endurance of these Polish crews. *Garland*, by the July of 1943, had completed about 180,000 miles of sea since the Polish flag was hoisted in the May of 1940.

In September of 1941, for example, she took part in the Spitsbergen expedition and a Malta convoy in the single month, moving from latitude 50° N. to the hot waters of the central Mediterranean almost without pause, almost without breathing space. She had covered, and was to cover, the seas from Reyjavik in Iceland to Halifax in Nova Scotia. She was to move in her guardianship from Britain to Gibraltar, from Gibraltar to the Dardanelles. Few ships, even in the hard-worked flotillas of the Allies, have covered such ground—few have covered such mileage.

III

On the morning of Saturday, May 24th, 1941, a British Admiralty communiqué said: "British naval forces intercepted early this morning off the coast of Greenland, German naval forces including the battleship *Bismarck* . . ."

That was the beginning of perhaps the most extraordinary chase in naval history. The great German battleship—laid down and built in absolute defiance of all existing treaties; one of Germany's major breaches of faith, even among the many on the naval side—had broken through our light cordon in the northern seas, and was driving down to the Atlantic.

Germany had placed much faith in the two great battleships of the "Bismarck" class. They were believed to be more powerful than any British ship afloat. Their speed was greater than anything we could send in pursuit of them. They were claimed to be unsinkable. The German High Command believed that they would recover the ground that had been lost through the failure of the pocket battleships; that they would demolish the convoys forced on the Allies by the U-boat whatever the protection given them.

But the *Bismarck* was sighted in the Denmark Straits, and was brilliantly shadowed by H.M.S. *Norfolk* and H.M.S. *Suffolk*. This is not the place for a full description of the run to the south; but *Bismarck* was damaged in the action in which *Hood* was sunk, broke clear despite

the closeness of the pursuit in the execrable visibility of the northern mists, kept south, was picked up again by a Catalina flying-boat, lost anew, and finally located by aircraft from *Ark Royal*. H.M.S. *Sheffield* was then detached to shadow her.

Despite the gale which made flying-off conditions perilously close to suicidal, *Ark Royal* flew off an attacking force and crippled the great ship. But the German boast that the *Bismarck* was unsinkable was very close to the truth. Despite two torpedoes, the great ship, though her speed was much reduced, showed no signs of sinking.

Night came on and she was still at large. It was decided to send in a destroyer attack. A division of "Tribal" class destroyers under Captain (now Rear-Admiral Sir Philip) Vian, and including O.R.P. *Piorun*, was sent in to the attack. *Bismarck* by this time was lost again in the wilderness of the Biscay gale. The destroyers formed a line of search with *Piorun* on the port wing. They proceeded for some time in this formation, staggering to the impact of the heavy seas, the spray driving over them.

Then, in the darkness, *Piorun* sighted ahead of her a dark and heavy bulk. The position of our ships was known: this could be only the *Bismarck*. She made the enemy report and continued to close. For a moment or two the great bulk was silent—then *Piorun* was sighted in her turn. *Bismarck* opened fire with everything that would bear. Commander Plawski continued to close, and in his turn opened fire with his main guns. Closer and closer, the two ships were absolutely clear to each other now, even in the night darkness. Closer still.—David against Goliath—*Piorun* went in and answered the German challenge.

She does not claim torpedo hits, but it is known that *Bismarck* was hit by torpedoes from *Cossack* and *Maori* which had the effect of still further slowing the great ship.

At the conclusion of the action Captain Vian made the signal: "Many congratulations that you were the first ship of our force to sight the enemy. I hope you may be with me next time I go into action." To which Captain Plawski replied: "We are proud to have been in your company, and it will be the greatest honour for us to be in action under your command against the *Tirpitz*."

IV

I went to sea first with the Polish Navy in O.R.P. *Slazak*.

It is not permissible to give full details of war-time construction, but "Hunt" class destroyers are small ships of about 1,000 tons with a powerful dual-purpose main armament and excellent anti-aircraft weapons. They are admirably suited to the major task for which they were designed—that of convoy escort and narrow seas patrol work. They are not Fleet destroyers; but it is not too much to say that,

coming into full production when they did, flowing down the slips in an ever-increasing stream, they made one of the major contributions of the war towards the safety of our shipping in the battle against U-boat and bomber 'plane.

To the growing Polish Navy came three of these fine ships—*Kujawiak*, *Krakowiak* and *Slazak*. They came at a time when *Burza*, for a while, was nearing the end of her period of maximum efficiency. French built, with French guns, the defection of Vichy had made replacement and ammunition problems insuperable, and she had temporarily to be taken out of service and re-armed. *Blyskawica*, too, had, as all destroyers must, come to the time for a major refit. The slender hull of a destroyer is a case for some of the most complex machinery afloat. The work *Blyskawica* and *Burza* both had done in the years since they had slipped out from under the nose of the German Navy in 1939 had tried engines, hulls, gear to the very limit of endurance.

Blyskawica spent a long time at a famous southern yard. And even while she was refitting she showed that the Polish Navy retains at all times and in every circumstance its fighting spirit, for the little town where the yard was situated was heavily attacked from the air. *Blyskawica* was refitting: her decks were a mass of ship's gear and builders' rubbish, spare parts and raw material, odds and ends of every sort and size. Some of her crew were on leave; by no manner of means could she be held to be a "fighting ship." And yet, in the thunder of this raid, she got her guns into action, and, joining their clamour to the anti-aircraft defences of the town, she helped to fight off the raid, and in the very heart and fury of it shot down a German bomber.

The refits for both ships were long, however, and the crew of *Burza* was transferred almost as a whole to *Slazak*, the third of the "Hunts" to come on the strength.

Meanwhile the earlier pair had already made fame for themselves in the narrow waters of the English Channel, in the North Sea and across the cold ocean to the Arctic Circle and the Lofotens. Some of their stories I heard from the people of *Slazak*; but I had already seen them in action, watched them, as it were, from a grand stand seat.

Going west with a British destroyer early one afternoon from a south coast base, we picked up, in the middle of a heavy squall of rain, a call for help from a convoy ahead of us. It was being attacked by dive-bombers operating from low cloud in the tangled visibility of a Channel afternoon. Before we could get up with them the attack was over—the attackers gone, flying through cloud cover to their home bases. No ships were sunk; there was slight damage only: the convoy was "proceeding."

As we came up to the senior ship of the escort, somebody on the bridge said, "That's *Crackerjack*." The main—in point of fact, the only—difficulty that the British Navy has had with the Polish Navy

has been in the names of its ships. So far the Signal School has not yet added a course in Polish pronunciation (and spelling) to its curriculum—but the time may come!

Krakowiak answered our polite enquiries after her health with a pungent comment on the Hun and the information that everything was all right, and we passed through the slow convoy at twenty-five knots, heading always west in obedience to our very definite orders. As we left the convoy astern, someone said, "They'll catch it again at dusk now."

They did.

As the light went and the young moon came up across the eastern sea, we heard a look-out shout, "Gun-flashes astern!" And, turning simultaneously, we saw, high in the evening sky, the prick of shell-bursts and the pulsing summer lightning of the guns. It spread across a curiously wide segment of the eastern sea, but the pricking shell-bursts were concentrated. We saw a series of bigger flashes, and somebody said, "Bombs!" But with the wind of our progress, the rush of the sea under our bows, we could hear nothing of the battle in the distance. The firing died, and for a little the east was dark.

Then we heard the voice of the look-out, "Gun-flashes again!" Seven times we watched the flickering lights, the pulsing brilliance along the horizon, that told of German 'planes coming in, of bombs dropping, of shells bursting. The weather, with the perversity of fate, had cleared; the sky and the moon were brilliant. The Germans had the convoy marked.

Yet we could not go back to help it. Our own work was pressing, immediate and important. We went on—and after a little the sky astern of us was quiet and dark save for the soaring stars.

The point of this story lies in a single comment that was made on the bridge of that destroyer. A voice said, "Pity we can't go back and give him a hand." And out of the darkness came another voice, "They'll be all right. She's a good ship, that Pole!"

The Royal Navy does not give its bouquets freely.

V

I sailed with *Slazak* from a West Country port. The wind that had been free all the afternoon woke in the evening, blowing from the west; and as we went towards the Start to make our rendezvous we rolled before it like a drunken sow. The sky was half-cloud, half-broken—good cover for a raiding 'plane. The visibility on the sea was fair. We went knowing that the enemy was never very far away.

On the edge of dusk we sighted, low, faint, and very far on the horizon, the ships that we had come to cover. And, as we sped towards them, still lurching with the scend and shudder of the following sea,

we heard the clang of the bell from the wireless room. There was an urgency about it, an urgency about the voice that came up the tube, "Blue —," the raider warning.

Automatically the Officer of the Watch, standing in the fore part of the bridge, put his thumb to the alarm bells. We could feel the ship quivering with them. Somewhere in the cloud there was a German 'plane, perhaps more than one; somewhere heading towards the little square of sea where our ship and the convoy drew together. And in the moments of that quivering, in the seconds of that swift-rising tension, I saw something of the efficiency of the Polish Navy. For before the bells had ceased to ring all guns were manned. In a swift, staccato sequence the reports were coming in from each position. We could see beside the bridge the Oerlikons swing free as the gunners loosed themselves and their mechanism in a swift preliminary circling.

And in a little we had other reports of the 'plane—a steady, accurate succession of them. We picked up far away the drone in the darkening cloud ahead of us. It circled round in a wide sweep, turned and moved north of us, north of where the leading ships of the convoy now hung broad on our starboard bow.

We turned too, taking up our position. And, as we turned, we came head on to wind and sea. Only the destroyer men know to the full those swift, bewildering changes from near calm running before the gale to the spray-drenched, howling ferocity that follows the 18-point swing back into the teeth of the wind. We could hardly hear, in the angry clamour of the wind through rigging and arials and superstructure, the distant throb of the Hun.

But, even as we turned, we felt the sea shudder beneath us, and somewhere astern of us in the murk towards the east, somewhere down by the tail of the convoy, there was the flash of bursting bombs. Immediately after it there was the stab of heavy machine-gun fire, the pin-point rise of tracer bullets. Then that too ceased. There was nothing else.

We headed west, plunging against the gale, keeping pace with the slow merchantmen that, head to wind and tide and westerly sea, hung there like half-tide wrecks, motionless and water-swept.

At dawn we had made hardly any progress, but we had kept through all the night a long quartering up and down, working like a sheep-dog on the edges of a flock caught in a mountain stream; watching for E-boats—though in this sea there was little fear of them—watching for aircraft that might come under the low cloud to pick up the white and tumbled phosphorescence of our wakes. Twice through the night we had alarms, but in this smother even those aerial eyes could not locate us. Dawn came, and the conyoy was still whole.

Orders came to us across the air telling us to go in to a snug harbour in the West Country. We edged in towards it, and, as we closed with

the coast, we saw, spread out in the lee of the great headland, the all-nation fishing fleet that works the southern grounds—red sails across the morning light.

The wind was easy here under the lee of the land, but it was easing out to seaward too. We made representations to authority, and from authority came a signal to the Commodore to head out to the west again. We passed on slowly, and overhead came out the aircraft of Fighter Command to guard our passing.

And, as we slipped the well-remembered landmarks past our beam, the Poles on the little bridge said, "We're getting to know this coast better now than the Baltic. We've been into every harbour of it; we know every bit of ground and every rock." And they began to name some of the places round the British Isles to which they had been under the stress of war. There is not a mile that has not seen these Polish ships, from St. Mary's in the Scillys to the farthest bitter fjords among the Orkneys.

This was a typical—an ordinary—convoy night. Some nights are worse, they said; some nights are better. Sometimes the enemy attacked in earnest; sometimes he left them alone: but always there was weather, the vagaries of tides, the treacheries of a rock-bound coast with which to deal; always there were the problems of the convoyed ships themselves, the problems of stragglers and damaged ships, the problems of the slow.

We met these the following night when we had rounded the end of England and were heading northwards and east again. One ship began to drop steadily astern. We sent a trawler of the escort to talk to her, and back over the water on the flashing Aldis lamp came the signal that the ship was losing steam and expected to "break down any minute." We told the trawler to stand by to take her in tow; and even as the message passed, another trawler out on our bow opened fire. This was an unreported 'plane, a snooper coming in low over the water and rising to attack.

Again I watched the instant readiness of this Polish crew. There was not a gun that could not have fired if that 'plane had come our way. She wheeled clear of the convoy itself, headed off and was lost in the growing dark. Perhaps she was winged—the trawler would not claim a certainty. But we knew that in the previous night's attack that German had carried away a balloon wire, and had been hit by machine-gun bullets. It might be that he had crashed.

Twice again in that night there were alarms, but no attack. Once we sheered suddenly to avoid a floating mine and the shriek of our whistle turned the convoy ships away from danger. Otherwise the night was clear; the weather good. At dawn we lay off the port of our destination, our convoy whole, our ships undamaged. The passage was over.

Four hours in port beside the oiler—four hours, fresh oil, a little food, and we slipped out of the harbour again to pick up a new convoy for the south.

That may serve as a "type" example of the runs the "Hunt" destroyers do—endless, unceasing work; always hard, always in the eye of the enemy, always filled with danger. But since the days they took their ships over, since the days when they completed "working up," the Poles have helped to run these convoys round the coasts—a heavy task well done.

VI

The refit of the *Burza* was completed, and she went back to convoy work with a new crew—one of those new crews that the Poles seem to pull mysteriously "out of a hat"—and she went back with efficiency unimpaired.

Early in 1943 she was covering a convoy with the American coast-guard cutter *Campbell* in one of the big wolf-pack attacks, when *Campbell* was seriously damaged. The American coast-guard cutter had put up an excellent fight, attacking in succession five submarines, two at least of which were seen on the surface prior to the attacks. Precise evidence as to the results was unobtainable owing to the urgent necessity of keeping up with the convoy.

Contact was made with a sixth submarine within eighteen hours. *Burza*, working in company with *Campbell*, attacked this contact, and it is believed that a pattern of her depth charges blew the U-boat to the surface. From the *Campbell* they sighted her crossing the bow from port to starboard a few hundred yards ahead. In a matter of seconds she was on top of the enemy. The U-boat turned to avoid collision even as the *Campbell* altered course to ram, but the distance was so small that the two ships came together with a tremendous crash, and the port hydroplane of the submarine ripped open the thin side of the coast-guard cutter. As she dropped astern the *Campbell* opened fire at short range with her 3-inch gun. "Three-inch shells slammed into the U-boat's hull at point blank range. We just couldn't miss." They actually saw men knocked off the submarine's deck into the water. There is small doubt that she was sunk.

But *Campbell* herself was in a desperate condition: water flooded the main switchboard and put her electric generators out of action. In a little her engine-room was untenable, and she drifted helpless. *Burza* fell back to cover her. Short of fuel, she circled her steadily to ward off torpedo attack; and when the *Campbell*'s case appeared hopeless, she took off the majority of her crew. Commander Hirshfield, however, with a small party, stood by his ship. The hull was partially patched and the *Campbell* floated, and eventually a tug was

sent out and brought her in to port. Before this happened *Burza*, with her fuel down to the last tons, had had to hand over the protection to a corvette.

From the North Atlantic she went south—the first Polish warship to cross the equator. She was built for the cold waters of the Baltic. In the South Atlantic her engine-room temperatures reached 140° F. Her engine-room personnel could last only thirty minutes in that furnace, but she survived. Her record of submarine attacks even in those waters is a remarkable one.

VII

Meanwhile in the North *Garland* was continuing her magnificent work. Towards the end of May 1942 she took part in the escorting of a convoy to Murmansk. In the words of the British Admiralty communiqué :

The passage of this convoy was made in the face of U-boat attacks and heavy and determined air attacks by bombers, dive-bombers and torpedo-carrying aircraft, which were delivered almost continuously for five days and nights. Nevertheless the convoy reached its destination with comparatively small losses.

Garland's anti-aircraft fire throughout this time, on the statements of British officers who were present at the action, was magnificent. Incessant attacks by torpedo-carrying aircraft were held off by her barrage fire, and the aircraft were compelled to drop their torpedoes at non-effective range.

On the fourth day *Garland* seemed to be singled out for terrific attacks, but, for most of the day, neither bombs nor machine-gun fire hit her. Towards the close of that day, however, a Junkers 88, diving through a curtain of fire, dropped a stick of four bombs close alongside. *Garland* disappeared in a wall of water and of smoke.

The commanding officer of one of the British escort vessels said "When I saw this happen, I said to my officers, 'That's finished the Poles; what a tragedy; they fought so magnificently.' But I didn't have time to finish what I was saying, as out from behind a wall of smoke and water emerged *Garland*, still firing."

Garland was not out of action, but she was badly damaged. Her hull and superstructure were riddled with metal from high-fragmentation anti-personnel bombs. Whole gun's crews had been wiped out. Her decks were covered with dead and dying. Yet she never ceased firing. Her Gunnery Officer, himself wounded, organised crews of artificers and cooks to keep the guns in action. The Paymaster, mortally wounded, handed over his store keys to a colleague before he died. One of her wounded, lying where he had been dragged to a

precarious safety, wrote on the white paint-work above him, "Poland—how sweet it is to die for thee!"

For eleven hours after that frantic moment *Garland* fought on. Towards morning she was detached to try to get her wounded into Murmansk. On the way she sighted a German submarine on the surface and attempted to engage it, but she could make only twenty knots on her damaged engines, and the submarine escaped on the surface. A little after she was sighted by a reconnaissance 'plane. For sixteen hours, as they sailed up through the ice-covered water to Murmansk, they waited for what seemed the inevitable attack. It never came.

For thirty-two hours her doctor, operating on the wardroom table, patched up the wounded. With half her crew bandaged and out of action, the fighting *Garland* came into Murmansk.

She lived to fight again. In the famous wolf-pack battle in which H.M.S. *Harvester*, with her much-beloved captain—Senior Officer of the escort group—Commander A. A. Tait, R.N., was sunk, she covered herself with distinction. In a reply to a letter of condolence, Professor Tait, brother of *Harvester's* captain, said:

I met my brother in London a month ago and he spoke in the highest terms of the Group which he had the honour to command. I think it is true to say that it was the proudest commission of his life to work with ships of the Polish and French Navies in so happy a companionship.

One remark of his remains in my mind, speaking of the Polish sailors he said: "*Every one of these men is a hero.*"

She was in the great fight of December 1942 when a single convoy was attacked thirty-five times by U-boats over a period of four days and four nights, and was credited with a probable on the third day after what her commanding officer described as "an exhilarating chase" on the surface.

The part of the Polish destroyers in the long Battle of the Atlantic is one of the most notable chapters in their history.

VIII

Convoy is the major work, the heavy job of the "Hunts"; but they have ~~fun~~ "fun," they call it, in between.

There were Polish destroyers, for example, in the second Combined Operations raid on the Lofoten Islands in December of 1941. That force penetrated far into the Arctic Circle to the islands that lie off the coast of Norway. Nearly a thousand miles from the northern base from which they sailed they reached Vestfjord undetected, unseen by German patrols or German aircraft.

On Christmas Day, as they moved in towards the Norwegian coast, they watched in the brief half-hour of the northern sunlight anxiously

for the enemy. There was no sign. At 6 a.m. on the morning of Boxing Day they stopped engines in the wide harbour of Reine between the islands. One party landed at Reine; one headed north to Sund; one moved south to Sorvagen. The Polish destroyers helped to cover these landings; they lay off to protect the transports from the German attack that they believed must come. There was no attack. We made our sweep of the Lofoten Islands, destroyed German establishments, a wireless station and coastal look-out posts, captured a number of German prisoners, took off a large number of Norwegian volunteers, and slipped out from the narrow inshore waters of the fjord without serious opposition.

They have "fun" nearer to England than that. Polish "Hunts" took part in a sweep along the convoy routes on the other side of the Channel that ended in two German ships being sunk almost at point-blank range by *Kujawiak*.

Polish ships went on the early Murmansk convoys and acquitted themselves notably in that cold hell of bombing, submarine and destroyer attack.

Kujawiak went to Malta. That was the convoy of June 1942. The passage through the Atlantic was uneventful. The convoy turned, slipped through the Straits of Gibraltar without attack, and headed east up the narrow basin of the middle sea. Few of our convoys have passed without attack through those narrow waters since Italy first stabbed France in the back in June of 1940.

This convoy, nearing the Sicilian narrows, was attacked by German and Italian bombers. Anti-aircraft fire from *Kujawiak* and a British destroyer close to her brought down two planes in this attack. They were credited to both ships.

For a little there was silence. Then, as they came nearer to the Sardinian coast, there was a fresh attack, this time by Junkers 88's. *Kujawiak's* ack-ack gunners claimed a probable in this assault.

There was a later attack—this time by some fifty German aircraft. Once again *Kujawiak* claimed a victim. She got a fourth in the course of that day in the last attack upon the convoy, and in the same raid damaged another 'plane by machine-gun fire. This 'plane was subsequently finished off by another ship of the escort.

On the following day the Italians decided to follow their aircraft attacks by a surface action. There was a brief brush between the Allied escort and Italian cruisers and destroyers. As on so many occasions, however, the Italians did not abide the question. The enemy force consisted of at least two 8-inch cruisers supported by destroyers. They were close to Pantellaria, the heavily fortified naval base of the Sicilian narrows. They could rely on aircraft support. Against them the major ship of the Allied escort force in this critical period was the anti-aircraft cruiser *Cairo*. Yet with her light guns

and the guns of the destroyers the Italian force was driven off. *Kujawiak* played an admirable part in this brief, exciting action.

Then, with Malta in sight and Valetta harbour ahead, one of the "Hunt" class destroyers of the screen blew up on a floating mine. *Kujawiak* closed her to pick up survivors—and, even as she stopped close to the men struggling in the water, there was a violent explosion astern. *Kujawiak* took an immediate list to port as the bulkheads went. Boats and rafts had already been lowered for the work of rescue. What were left were put over the side, and the order given to abandon ship. The captain, one officer and one A.B. remained on the ship for a further ten minutes, the captain attempting to save papers from his cabin. While he was doing this the ship took a violent lurch. Tables and chairs fell across the cabin and blocked the doorway. The other two men, who had been on deck, feeling that the ship was about to go, went in, found the block, cleared it, and helped their captain out.

Less than a minute after they jumped from the side, *Kujawiak* went down. With her went fourteen petty officers, killed when the petty officers' mess was blown in by the force of the explosion.

The other Polish "Hunts" continued in the Channel. In August of 1942 the Allies raided Dieppe on Hitler's western wall. *Slazak* took part in that intricate, difficult and valuable operation, the first major example of complete trilateral combination between the services. She opened fire at 3.50 a.m. on the morning of the attack on the trawlers covering the convoy that so unfortunately interposed itself between us and our objective. She ceased fire at 7.35 p.m. in the evening. During that period she had made five depth-charge attacks against submarine contacts, she had opened fire ten times against the coast batteries and thirty times against air attack. She had brought down two Dornier 217's, one Messerschmitt 109, one Junkers 88, and damaged at least one of each of these two latter classes. She had rescued one officer and nineteen other ranks of the army, one Spitfire pilot, one R.N.V.R. officer, and five Germans from a sunken trawler; and she had had three men killed and twelve wounded.

Her success at Dieppe played a considerable part in placing her, with a British destroyer, at the head of the navies of the Allies for the number of enemy aircraft destroyed in 1942.

IX

Together with their brothers of the surface ships the men of the Polish submarine service had through all this period carried on.

The *Jastrzab* was lost in the Arctic, but most of her crew was saved, though her British liaison officer was killed and various ratings wounded.

Sokol (Falcon) completed her "working up" period, did her first trials in British waters, and then went to the Mediterranean. On her

first patrol she worked for ten days without a target just outside an Italian harbour. On the tenth day a big convoy came out. It was protected by aircraft overhead, by a large armed merchant cruiser and by four destroyers. The weather was bad. *Sokol* was bumping violently in a steep sea and it was abnormally difficult to keep the ship at periscope depth, and moreover the armed merchant cruiser was zig-zagging. But despite the difficulty they got to an attacking position and fired a salvo of torpedoes. The tracks were sighted by destroyers and attacks followed almost at once, but before the crash of the first depth charges *Sokol* had heard the explosion of her torpedoes.

Two days later, in brilliant moonlight she intercepted a 4,000-ton supply ship close to the shore in the Bay of Naples. Her boats were half-lowered and as soon as she sighted *Sokol* she stopped and her crew abandoned ship. *Sokol* sank her by gun-fire and submerged rapidly to dodge the attacks of E-boats from the Italian coast.

That same night she sighted a U-boat close to herself on the surface, but by this time she had fired all her outfit of torpedoes and could make no attack.

For her successes on this, her first, patrol she was presented, following the custom of the Mediterranean submarines, with the skull and cross-bones of the "Jolly Roger." A signal from the Rear-Admiral Commanding Submarines at Malta ended with the words: "And this patrol again proved the efficiency and fearless determination with which Lieutenant-Commander Karnicki commands *Sokol*."

On her second patrol she pursued an Italian convoy that was making for Navarino harbour after an attack by the R.A.F. and the Fleet Air Arm. Unable to catch up with the ships before they entered the harbour, she followed them almost into the entrance, and, firing a salvo of torpedoes into the darkness of the shallow waters, she sank an Italian destroyer. Panicking, the Italians weighed anchor and proceeded to sea again, convinced that the submarine was inside amongst them. Despite absolute darkness and the difficulty of spotting ships against the background of the black cliffs, she found two fresh targets and hit them both—one a big troopship, the other a heavily laden supply ship. In the course of manœuvring after this attack she became entangled in anti-submarine nets. By violently reversing and going ahead on her engines she shook herself free, and backed clear of the obstructions. No depth-charge attack was made on them after this because the water was full of struggling German soldiers.

Continuing her cruise, *Sokol* sighted another Italian vessel which, following precedent, was abandoned by her crew the moment they sighted the Polish ship. They boarded the Italian and found a kitten, deserted and mewling, on her decks. The kitten was adopted, re-christened "Musso," and became the mascot of the ship. Unhappily, in a raid on Malta it was killed. Her crew say, with a bland evenness

of tone, that they "hope the same thing happens one day to the other Musso."

In an extract from an order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish forces it is stated that *Sokol* in one limited period spent fifty-eight days at sea, being during that period submerged for nine hundred and thirty hours. Only sub-mariners can judge the endurance, the strength and the courage needed for that performance.

When the blitz developed on Malta *Sokol* was in dockyard hands for refit. It was urgently necessary to get her away if possible, and through the efforts of her crew, assisted by British officers, some portion of the most pressing work was completed.

But the Malta harbours were becoming rapidly untenable. The story of how British submarines, working from the port, were serviced under water is amongst the epics of the war, but *Sokol* could not submerge. Moreover, her batteries were out of commission. Committing all the engineering crimes known to modern practice, her people coupled up the generators direct to the propeller shafts; and though they had to work below in gas-masks owing to the chlorine given off by the damaged batteries, though they could not submerge for refuge from enemy aircraft, though the crazy coupling of the motors might break down at any moment, they put to sea. With H.M.S. *Penelope* they share the honours of that escape. On the surface, across the Italian minefields, they made their way through the Sicilian narrows and reached Gibraltar, with every commandment in the book of submarine management broken behind them.

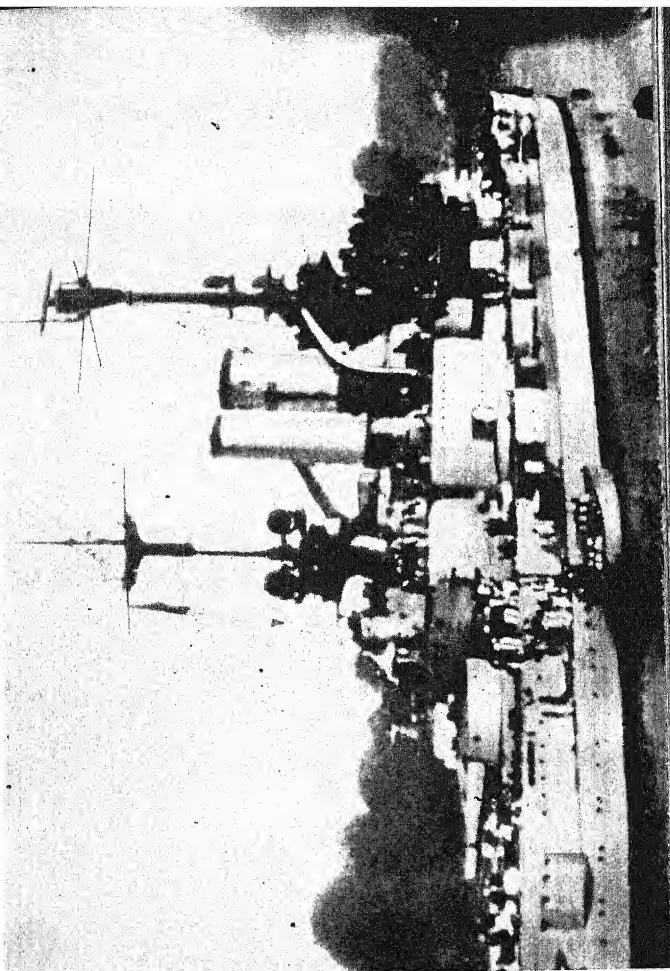
She lived to complete her revenge. As the news of the Italian surrender flickered across the air, she was patrolling in the Adriatic. At once she stood boldly in to Bari harbour, rounded up all the shipping in the harbour that could move—a total of ten cargo ships and auxiliaries—and, on the surface, shepherded her convoy south through the Otranto Straits. On the way she fell in with an Italian submarine. Briskly and purposefully she ordered her to join the convoy, and took her flock down and into Malta harbour. The cycle was complete.

Dzik, the newest of the submarines of the Polish Navy, working also in the Mediterranean, had by then sunk 25,000 tons of enemy ships: one ship in the Straits of Messina, one near the Aeolian Islands and two near Bari. A few weeks later, as the Germans began the evacuation of Corsica, she picked off five ships in swift succession—a tanker, a transport and three large landing craft.

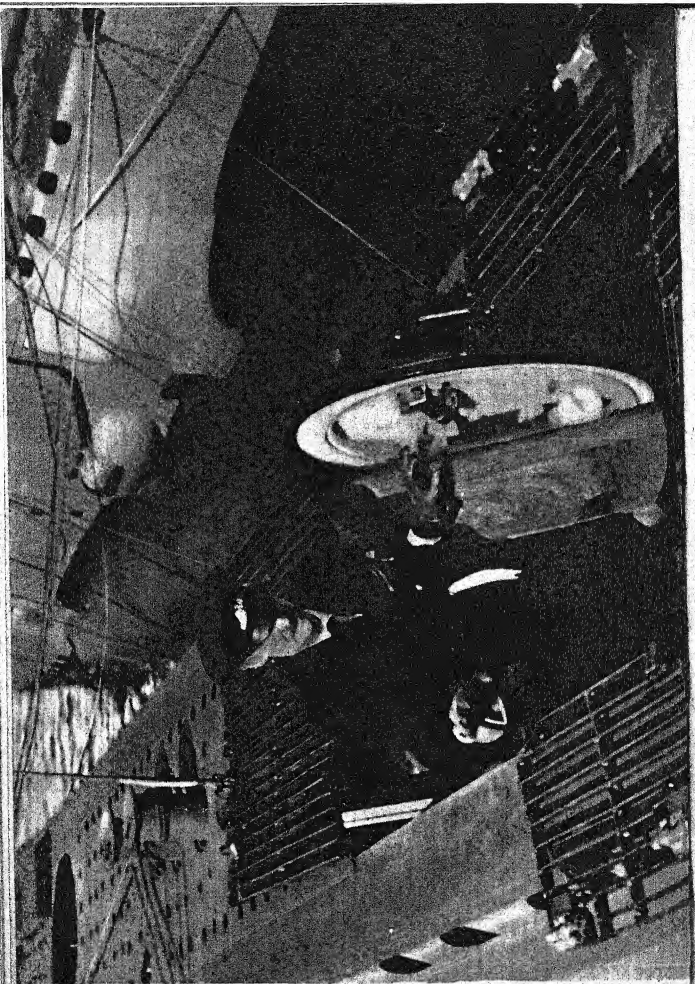
They matched their surface ships—there can be no higher praise.

X

The youngest and newest of all the Polish Navy were the motor-torpedo-boats and the motor-gunboats of "Coastal Forces." This



The old German battleship "Schleswig Holstein" firing on Westerplatte at point-blank range.



King Haakon leaving the new Norwegian submarine "Ula," built in a British yard to help replace Norway's lost navy.

was the young man's share. With the Royal Navy, with ships of the other Allied Navies, "Coastal Forces," under Admiral Kekewich, became, after a period of experiment, one of the most remarkable and one of the most successful branches of the naval war.

In the summer months of 1942 they moved from what might be called the defensive—that is, work in protection of our coastwise convoys and anti-E-boat patrols—to a long-sustained offensive that waged from the Cherbourg peninsula to the Texel. All up and down the coasts of northern France, of Belgium and of Holland, they harried tankers and coastal vessels of the German trade; they drove them out of large convoys into small; they drove them from small convoys until the Germans took to moving single ships under an almost grotesque protection—and even these they harried.

Despite the paucity of targets along the French coast, by August they had reached the point where they were sinking more shipping on the German side of the Channel than the Germans, even against our heavy convoys, were sinking along the British coast.

And in this brilliant campaign the Poles played an important part. One story must serve for many. In the small hours of the morning of June 21st two Polish M.G.B.s were working on reconnaissance to the east of our patrols that were covering the passage of a convoy along the Channel coast. One of the two ships developed engine-room defects and, after reporting them to base, was instructed to return. The other ship carried on.

After some while a strong force of E-boats was sighted and reported by W/T to the base. As it was clear that she would be heavily outnumbered and probably overwhelmed by the weight of armament on the other side, a signal was sent ordering her recall. She received the signal—but language difficulties appear sometimes at inconvenient moments. The Polish lieutenant in command of the M.G.B. found himself unaccountably, and purely temporarily, unable to understand the signal.

He carried on, sighted the enemy and, with his engines flat out, closed them and engaged. There were six German craft, all of approximately the size and armament of his own. With the spray racing from his bows, the foam of his wake piled high astern of him, he thundered into the centre of them, every gun firing. Taken by surprise, the Germans returned his fire for a moment; then, wheeling in swift succession, turned and made off. The attack that had been threatened on the convoy never developed. Single-handed this one M.G.B. had driven off the enemy.

In the signal that was made after the action the officer commanding the base said: "I am not without suspicion that this misunderstanding was a case of turning the blind eye and, if so, results fully justified this following of precedent."

XI

In November of 1942 the war moved to a new phase. The swift, almost breathless moves of the end of the Mediterranean campaign are still full of curious wonder. In that narrow sea we developed—suddenly, it seemed almost miraculously—the real technique of co-operation. Navies, armies, air forces coalesced and worked together as a single weapon, and that weapon was thrust immediately, endlessly, forcefully against the enemy.

On November 8th British and American armies landed along the North African coast from Algiers to Casablanca. The Poles, with their genius for achieving a place in any major operation, were there. At Sidi Ferruch, the headland to the west of Algiers city where the French landed for the conquest of North Africa in 1830, we put in the right flank of the force that was destined to take Algiers. *Blyskawica* was with the escort. In the course of the landing she stood off nine attacks from the air and dealt with two submarines. Immediately after she covered a large Dutch liner loaded with American and British troops. Again she beat off attack from the air by torpedo 'planes, and almost simultaneously fought off a submarine, claiming a probable sinking.

From that she went to Bougie, up the coast, the strange little port that lies hidden under Cape Carbon to the east of Algiers. The enemy paid her the high tribute there of making her the main target for his attacks—apparently from her size they assessed her as a cruiser at least—and she endured four hours of attacks from between thirty and forty Junkers 88's, culminating in a terrific onslaught made by twenty 'planes simultaneously. She was not hit, but she had three killed and forty-two wounded by the splinters of near misses. She brought one 'plane down for certain, and several were damaged. The conduct of her wounded on that occasion, as on all the occasions when there has been loss in Polish destroyers, was once more astonishing for its self-sacrifice.

She repaired damage at Gibraltar, underwent a brief refit there, and again took up her work, patrolling the Sicilian Channel and the coast of the island in company with British destroyers. And in the course of that service she received from Admiral Cunningham the signal: "Force H. is proud to have a unit of the Polish Navy to fight with them and to serve in such good company."

The campaign moved forward. Tripoli fell: the Mareth Line was broken: the enemy fought with his back to Tunis town, and that too went. And at once the preparations began for Sicily.

Poland had three destroyers in the vast armada that covered the Sicilian landings—*Piorun*, *Krakowiak* and *Slazak*. *Piorun* worked with the big ships, as she had long worked, proudly in the battleships'

screen: *Slazak* covered the beach landings: *Krakowiak* made a fresh name for herself in the fury of the hottest part of the landings south of Catania. Incessantly engaged against enemy batteries and mobile guns along the shore, she helped to cover first the landing and then the steady advance of the Eighth Army. Again the Polish destroyers played a high part in the complex and vital naval tactic of the time.

And once again the campaign moved on—this time to Italy. When H.M.S. *Nelson*, H.M.S. *Rodney* and H.M.S. *Orion* thrust into the Messina Straits and bombarded Reggio, the southernmost town of Italy, *Piorun* took her part also in the hail of shells that broke all hopes of a German resistance to our landings. The report of that action came back to the Polish Naval Headquarters in London in an Italian official envelope. Printed across the top of the envelope was the name of its department. It read: *Reggio Istituto Fascisto per commercio estero*. This was the new, grim, external trade of Italy.

XII

The Polish Navy continued—continues—to expand. The new destroyer *Orkan*, another Fleet destroyer, was added towards the middle of 1943. Detached for convoy escort work, she was lost before the year was out. *Piorun*, working magnificently on the Italian coast in the bombardment that went right up the Gulf of Gaeta, was lost in her turn. But even with those losses the Polish Navy is greater in destroyer strength now than it was when the war broke out. And to the destroyers had been added the light cruiser *Dragon*, a rebuilt British “D” class cruiser.

Five ships got away from the Baltic in the disastrous days of 1939. Two of those ships have been lost, but to-day the Polish Navy, stronger than it was at the height of its pre-war history, has achieved a matchless name. It is not possible to measure fame or to make assessment of self-sacrifice, but in the four years since the Polish Navy fired the first shot in this greatest of all wars her people have won from the British Navy eleven D.S.O.s, eleven D.S.C.s and sixteen D.S.M.s—these are in addition to the strictly Polish awards of twenty-seven *Virtuti Militari* and eight hundred and fifty Crosses of Valour. The British Navy does not give awards lightly. If measure be wanted, it is here.

NORWAY

CHAPTER I

I

IT was very dark. The slender crescent of the new moon was hidden almost all the time by the low swirling masses of the cloud. Rain mist covered the waters. Neither sea nor the shore of the fjords was visible save in the momentary clearings. The mouth of Oslofjord was very lonely, and in that loneliness a single ship—the *Pol III*, small, insignificant, a whalecatcher, converted from its peace-time uses, by the addition of a single gun, to a vessel of the neutrality patrol—sighted a force of heavy ships heading northwards into the very heart of Norway. Her commanding officer, Vernepliktig kaptein Leif Welding Olsen, made the challenge of the night.

It was not answered.

He immediately made the signal to heave to. It was ignored. With his one gun he opened fire. Instantly from the German line came the flash and thunder of an overwhelming reply. Hit by the armament of the heavy torpedo-boats of the German screen, by the guns of the big ships themselves, the *Pol III* was reduced almost within the compass of that first thunder to a wreck.

Welding Olsen had both legs severed by a shell. He retained consciousness long enough to order his crew to the single boat that was left them, and, knowing that one boat overloaded as they scrambled in, he said quietly, "I am useless, anyhow," and rolled himself over the side.

The first gun of a new war had been fired : the first man had died for Norway : and the first nascent moments of a new spirit had begun.

II

Norway has a coast-line of two thousand miles from headland to headland. If the deep indentations of the fjords that seam her countryside be taken in, the coasts of the leads and the larger islands be reckoned in as well, twelve thousand miles of tide-mark fringe her shores. To guard that coast, to protect her merchant fleet—the second largest of the world's ocean-going fleets, five million tons of ships—she had a navy of two coast-defence battleships almost forty years of age, seven light destroyers (hardly more than torpedo-boats), nine small submarines and forty small craft from sloops and torpedo-boats to minelayers and minesweepers. To these, for the necessities of the neutrality patrol, she had added about sixty auxiliary vessels—

fishery protection ships, armed trawlers and steam whalers, of which the *Pol III* was one.

Even to cover her main coast-line the Royal Norwegian Navy was inadequate. One cannot measure the worth of ships by miles of coast-line, but with all its auxiliaries drawn in, the hundred and twenty ships of the mobilised Norwegian Navy would each have had to guard some seventeen miles of coast. Only in concentration could the Norwegian Navy have been capable of fighting as a navy; but the very needs of its mobilisation, the necessities of the neutrality patrol, made it imperative that ships should work along the limits of Norwegian territorial waters from the Varangerfjord to Halden. Their purpose was to ensure that the warring powers made no illegal use of those waters over which Norway, by custom and by international law, held sovereignty.

Uneasily, through seven months of war, they had fulfilled their task, striving to keep the balance between the hard claims of the belligerents. Britain had protested against their actions; Germany had protested: the balance was held equal. Through those fantastically difficult months Norwegians, clinging desperately to a tradition of nearly a century and a quarter of neutrality, had done their utmost to favour neither side. There had been notable events in that struggle. The removal of the German prize crew from the *City of Flint* and the handing back of the ship to the American Government had roused Germany to an almost incoherent anger. The passage of the *Altmark* unhindered until the action of the Joessingfjord had roused in Britain a heavy indignation. But though Norway in the seven months might have made mistakes, it seems, on a cool weighing of the evidence as it stands to-day, that the voice of history will declare her to have behaved with a scrupulous regard for her precise traditions.

But the naval necessities of that neutrality patrol were the precise opposite of the naval necessities of war. For the purposes of neutrality it was essential that her fleet and her auxiliaries should be dispersed. It is worth while also to consider the broader aspects of the principal of neutrality as opposed to the necessities of a fighting fleet. For a hundred and twenty-six years Norway had been at peace. Prior to that, and for a short while, she had been dragged unwilling into the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars at Denmark's skirt. Before that she had had peace since 1720. Two hundred years without a battle do not condition a navy for the harsh necessities of war. There was never doubt of Norway's courage—if there had been the death of Welding Olsen wiped it out—but in the long years of peace Norway's Navy had never been conditioned to war. Only through tradition does a navy acquire that sense of necessities, that grasp of essentials, that ability to organise for emergency. Only by tradition is the complex of units, the whole superstructure of building slips and dockyards,

of ordnance factories and bases, of small ships and big, welded into the corporate reality of a fleet. A fighting navy is a single organism.

Norway's Navy was, both through the tradition of two centuries and the necessities of seven months, an inchoate mass of far divided particles. That Germany knew, and of that Germany took advantage. She struck in the fullness of treachery, without warning, against a country whose army she knew was not mobilised, whose seaward defences she knew were old and ill-equipped—there were no secrets in the defence of Norway in the years of peace. She struck against a navy that she knew was spread over fourteen degrees of the sea's wide surface.

But it is doubtful even had the Norwegian Admiralty had time to plan and to concentrate—if it had so planned—its scattered forces, whether the result could have been in any degree delayed. Germany's Navy at the outbreak of the war was small, but it was composed entirely of modern units of enormous hitting power, of high speed and of a great degree of theoretical efficiency. Germany divided her forces to strike at six points at once, but she was able to put at each of those six points, by throwing her whole naval force into the action, vessels that were superior in every way to anything which Norway possessed.

The heaviest ships of Norway's Fleet to go into action were the *Norge* and the *Eidsvold* of 4,200 tons, built in 1901, lightly armoured and with guns and fire control of an antique vintage. There were also the *Harald Haarfagre* and the *Tordenskjold* of an even greater antiquity, actually out of commission and used as depot ships.

To support these four ships—supposing that all of them could have been made ready for sea—there were four small destroyers of the "Sleipner" class of 700 tons (the two remaining vessels were not yet in commission) and three of the "Draug" class, ships of 570 tons, with an armament of three 4-inch guns in the "Sleipners" and six 3-inch in the "Draugs," plus torpedo tubes. In addition to these was an assortment of torpedo-boats ranging from the "Snögg" class of 220 tons to the little ships of the "Falk" class of only 70 tons. The only large modern ships in the entire Norwegian Navy were the mine-layer *Olav Tryggvason* of 1,900 tons with four 4.7-inch guns and the sloop *Fridtjof Nansen*, built for fishery protection duties, with two 4-inch guns.

Not all the concentration of the Norwegian Fleet could have changed the issues of that terrible night. Whether Norway, with her tremendous coast-line, her absolute dependence on the sea, her vast mercantile marine, was justified in the maintenance of so small and elderly a navy is a question for the Norwegians themselves.

III

In Oslofjord, the great indentation which continues the inverted "V" of the Skagerrak and the Kattegat and thrusts seventy miles into the very heart of Norway, there was a handful of ships. In Horten harbour the *Harald Haarfagre* and the *Tordenskjöld*, lying at their quaysides without steam up and incapable of combat, were the largest units. With them, but lying at a buoy in the roadstead of Horten, was the *Olav Trygvason*, and elsewhere in Oslofjord were four submarines—A. 2, A. 3 and A. 4 at Tönsberg on the west side of the fjord (very small ships of 250–340 tons, with three torpedo tubes and a complement of only fifteen men), and one "B" class ship, B. 4 (420–550 tons with four tubes and a complement of twenty-three) refitting at Horten.

In addition to these main units there were the *Glommen* and the *Laugen*, twenty-five-year-old minelayers of 340 tons; the *Vidar*, the *Brage* and the *Nor*, minelayers; and the two small minesweepers *Oira* and *Rauma*. With these was a handful of old torpedo-boats converted into minesweepers, auxiliary trawlers and steam whalers.

With the exception of the *Olav Trygvason* there was not a single combat vessel of a thousand tons. And against them Germany flung the pocket battleship *Deutschland*, the 10,000-ton armoured cruiser *Blücher*, the light cruiser *Emden* of 5,600 tons, the *Brummer*, a modern gunnery training ship of 2,140 tons, and a screen of minesweepers, torpedo-boats and motor craft.

There could have been no sea battle in the Oslofjord even had Norway time to organise her whole defences. There could have been only a sea massacre.

Yet it is possible that Oslo might have been defended; for the geographical difficulties of that seaport city, set deep in the heart of its own countryside, are enormous. It should never have been possible to take it from the sea. In point of fact it was not actually taken from the sea. In the plans for the general defence of Norway the Norwegian Admiralty and Ministry of Defence had conceived of minefields stretching along different sectors of the Norwegian coast. In the area of the Oslofjord itself it had planned and devised minefields in two lines, one in the outer part of the fjord, and one line of electrically controlled mines in the narrows. But those minefields had not been laid. There has been a story that the electrical communications were sabotaged by treachery. There were no electrical communications for there were no mines.

In other wars it would have been incredible that invasion of a peaceful country could take place in overwhelming strength in a single night utterly without the foreknowledge of that country. But in this war the incredible has happened too often.

Germany fell upon a Norway distracted by the action of the major enemy of the Nazi régime. On April 8th the British and French Governments issued an announcement that the Allies were laying mines in Norwegian waters. Paragraph 7 of that announcement reads :

His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and the French Government have accordingly resolved to deny the continued use by the enemy of stretches of territorial waters which are clearly of particular value to him, and they have therefore decided to prevent unhindered passage of vessels carrying contraband of war through Norwegian territorial waters. They accordingly hereby give notice that the following areas of Norwegian territorial waters have been rendered dangerous to navigation on account of mines. Vessels entering these areas will do so at their peril. . . .

It is not necessary at this stage to go into the Norwegian Government's protests as to that action. They were vigorous, dignified and, from some points of view, justified. But the Allies' action in laying those mines was justified by the hard necessities of total war. The German iron ore traffic, the known routes of ships such as the *Altmark* and others slipping back to Germany after commerce raids over the width of the oceans, made it absolutely essential that the Allies should force shipping out of the covered way of Norwegian territorial waters.

But Norway in her traditional neutrality had no option but to protest, for on that infringement of her sovereign rights might depend the future conduct of Germany towards her. She had to strive once again desperately to hold the balance.

All through the hectic day of Monday, April 8th, the Norwegian Foreign Relations Committee, the Storting, and the Norwegian Government discussed the Allied intervention, and all through that day came in a flood of rumour and conjecture. How much the preoccupation over the Allied mining and the necessity for the preservation of the balance of neutrality prevented due attention to the signs and portents of the day, it is not easy to say ; but it is on record that even when the amazing story of the survivors of the *Rio de Janeiro*—the 5,000-ton German transport which was sunk by the Polish submarine *Orzel* outside Lillesand, not far from the Naze—reached the Storting in secret session, no serious notice was taken of it. The survivors of the *Rio de Janeiro* had told Norwegian sailors and fishermen that they were bound for Bergen to assist Norway against the Allies !

But shortly after the news of the *Rio de Janeiro* a telephone call reached the Norwegian Foreign Office from the Legation in London warning them of a telegram containing information of an alleged German naval operation towards Narvik. In addition, the telegram, when it arrived, stated that German advance forces had been sighted off the Norwegian coast proceeding northward, and might be expected to arrive a little after midnight at the ore port. These reports were

passed from the Foreign Office to the military authorities and to the naval and military forces at Narvik.

But there had been other reports in the last three months of German forces moving towards the north, and they had come to nothing. There had been other reports from the Norwegian Legations in Germany and other countries of German moves against Norway that also had come to nothing. The Norwegian Government appears—so far as one can judge—to have believed that the preparations in the German Baltic ports which were known to all the Secret Services, neutral and belligerent alike, were directed solely against Denmark. It was felt in Norway that Denmark was in dire danger. It was felt in Norway that Norway herself was safe.

This was the blindness of a too ardent spirit of neutrality. Even at 9.15 on the fatal night of Monday, April 8th, the Storting and the Government alike closed their day on the decision of protest to Great Britain and the Allies over the mining of the previous night, with the feeling of a day's work done. At ten o'clock Professor Koht, the Foreign Minister, "was able to go out for supper."

At 11.15 Commander Welding Olsen died in the defence of his country.

At a little after midnight, in the first minutes of April 9th, the air raid sirens sounded in Oslo. The Foreign Minister was on his way home. There are few things more strange in this war than the story of Professor Koht trying to get back to the Foreign Office—the telephone out of operation in the first minutes of the alarm, the city strange in its utter black-out, and the Foreign Minister, unable to find transport, hurrying down the blackened road, bumping from one pedestrian to another in a desperate effort to reach the nerve centre of a Norway that he did not yet know was at war.

IV

Already the guns of the lower fjord had opened on the enemy. At 11.40 the German line, with the *Blücher* leading, had reached the vicinity of the Raufv fortress, in the outer defences of Oslo. The mist was heavy over the fjord, but in a brief instant of clarity the garrison of the fortress sighted the German ships and got off four rounds before the mist swirled down on them again. The second fortress of the outer defences was the island of Bolaerne; but Bolaerne, blinded by the darkness of the mist, saw nothing of the enemy, and the *Blücher* and the *Deutschland* went past in safety.

In Oslo over the tense telephones the messages came winging in as look-outs and watchers on the shore reported the progress of the enemy. There came a message that told of foreign warships steaming in past the outer defences of Bergen. A little after two, through an

extraordinary call to the Swedish Legation, came a report of a German torpedo-boat lying outside Stavanger.

The Government had been re-summoned at 1.30 a.m. At 3.30 it was reported that two battleships had raced by the Agdenes forts and had thrust into the fjord of Trondheim. In an atmosphere of disaster, in the knowledge that they were surrounded on the sea north, west and south, the Norwegian Government, preserving always courage and dignity, gave the orders for mobilisation. There was no need yet for loss of hope. The main German force directed on the capital itself had still to pass the inner fortress of Oscarsborg.

And at 3.30 a.m. the inner battle began. The story of the Oscarsborg defences has in it every element of drama. That was the last line—beyond was nothing but an open city. That was the last hope of a proud and independent nation.

At 3.30 a.m., at a distance of 2,000 metres, the look-outs of Oscarsborg sighted the leaders of the German line, the cruiser *Blücher* towering above the little vessels of the screen. Swiftly the range fell, the head of the line coming on every moment closer and closer to the old 11-inch guns of the fort. At 1,400 metres—less than a mile—the commander of the Oscarsborg fortress gave the order to open fire. For 11-inch guns the range was point-blank. The first salvo hit *Blücher* on "A" turret, putting the turret out of action: the second hit on "B," the super-imposed turret just below the bridge. Vast streamers of flame roared into the night, and blazing, the great ship went by.

In a matter of moments she came into the line of the fixed torpedo defences of the narrows. Two torpedoes struck her in rapid succession, and, blazing still more fiercely, she heeled over and sank. And where she had gone down a vast lake of flaming oil made the dark night brilliant.

And with her went eight hundred members of her crew, and fifteen hundred men of the military landing party that was to have taken the surrender of the capital of Norway, the staff of the General in command of the landing, Gestapo units that were to have policed the new territory. Two hundred men came out of that inferno to the shore.

Almost at point-blank range *Brummer*, the 2,400-ton gunnery training ship, was sunk by the Oscarsborg guns. The *Deutschland* and the *Emden* were hit and damaged. Swinging at once with their escort of minesweepers and torpedo-boats, they turned for the safety of the night beyond the narrows. The battle of Oscarsborg was over. It had broken the main German thrust on Oslo. It had caused grievous loss to the German Navy—the first of the loss that was to cripple the German surface Fleet for the rest of the war.

But it was not enough.

V

There were still German ships in Oslofjord. *Deutschland*, *Emden*, a number of destroyers or heavy torpedo-boats of the "Albatros" class—ships of 800 tons with three 5-inch guns and six torpedo tubes and a speed of thirty-four knots. In the last hours of darkness they seemed to have licked their wounds somewhere in the basin north of Jeløy. At dawn they fell on Horten.

In Horten, as has been said, there were the old depot ships and the *Olav Tryggvason*, lying without steam up at anchor. Horten, though it was the principal Norwegian naval base, was an undefended town. Norway had relied on the seaward defences for its preservation.

Warned by the guns of Rauøy, heartened perhaps by the victory of Oscarsborg, the guns crews of the *Olav Tryggvason* were closed up and ready. As the German force, covered by the *Emden*, approached the port, the *Olav Tryggvason* opened fire. In the brisk action that followed she sank the R. 17 (a *Raumboot*) and the *Albatros*, the name ship of her class.

In the first rush a small number of German troops had been landed from two *Raumboats* (R. 17 and R. 27) and these troops met little opposition. Outside the fjord were the heavy guns of the *Deutschland* and the *Emden*; and overhead, as the dawn gave way to the light of this day of disaster, the Luftwaffe circled.

There was no possibility of defending Horten. It had virtually no anti-aircraft guns. It had no batteries to answer the modern high-velocity 11-inch guns of the *Deutschland*. It had to answer the Luftwaffe only a handful of reconnaissance 'planes. Despite the fact that one German bomber was brought down by one of these 'planes of the Norwegian Fleet Air Arm, there was no possibility of resistance. Under the threat of bombardment from the sea, of merciless bombing from the air, Horten surrendered.

VI

Meanwhile German troops had landed at a number of points along the coast. They landed south of Oscarsborg, at Moss on the east side of the fjord and at Filtvedt on the west. Subsequent landings took place at Halden just above the Swedish border on the east and at Larvik, important fishing port at the very mouth of the Oslofjord. From Moss, Oslo was thirty-five miles as the crow flies. On motor bicycles, in armoured cars, in commandeered transport, the Germans went to Oslo.

And even as they travelled the Luftwaffe was dropping parachute troops to take the Oslo aerodromes. Oscarsborg was being subjected to wave after wave of heavy bombs. Between six and seven hundred

bombs were dropped on the fortress, and by the late afternoon, with the country behind it in German hands, Oscarsborg was paralysed into surrender. The Government had left the capital. The battle of the fjord was over—and on the tide the bodies of the German dead came up to Oslo.

VII

Kristiansand lies under the point of Lindesnes. The terminus of the Oslo railway, it is the most important port of the extreme south of the country. It was the headquarters of a naval district, and was fortified. In it on the night of April 8th were two submarines, B. 2 and B. 5, two destroyers of the "Sleipner" class, *Odin* and *Gyller*, the small torpedo-boat *Kjell* of 90 tons (which was refitting), three old torpedo-boats, *Lyn*, *Blink* and *Kvik* (converted into patrol vessels) and five auxiliary patrol vessels—mostly converted whalers.

Against this force the Germans threw the armoured cruiser *Karlsruhe* of 6,000 tons, mounting nine 5.9-inch guns in triple mountings with six 3.5-inch anti-aircraft guns and twelve torpedo tubes. She had a complement of five hundred and seventy. With her was the motor ship *Tsingtau* of 2,000 tons and a force of five destroyers and ten motor-torpedo-boats. There were also transports waiting to enter the port when the business of the heavy ships should be done.

At 5.15 in the misty morning *Karlsruhe* opened the entrance to the port. The batteries immediately opened fire at a range of 6,000 metres, and secured hits fairly early in the course of the action. The firing in general was admirable, and the *Karlsruhe* speedily came round through a hundred and eighty degrees and turned out to sea.

After a short interval, in which her guns attempted to put the forts out of action at long range, she came in again at speed. Again she was hit and turned to seaward. German bombers were already in the vicinity, and the tactic was immediately changed to an aerial bombardment of the harbour and the forts while *Karlsruhe* maintained a heavy and accurate fire from extreme range. In the course of this dual bombardment ammunition dumps within the fortifications blew up, severely hampering continued resistance. From 7.30 to 9.30 the bombing and the bombardment continued.

Meanwhile one transport had been sunk within the confines of the fjord by one of the fortresses, and two destroyers of the "Albatros" class were also sunk.

About 9.30 the German forces disappeared to seaward. The direct assault had failed. Kristiansand, badly battered, with many fires burning, was still valiant.

Then, a little before eleven o'clock, an order reached the officer in command of the naval district in the Norwegian naval code stating that

British and French destroyers might come to the assistance of the hard-pressed garrison. Soon after this five destroyers appeared over the horizon, heading for the entrance of the fjord at high speed. As they approached it became clear that they were carrying French colours, and, in view of the telegraphic information which had been received and the positive orders contained in it, they were permitted to enter the fjord. Not until they were right into the inner harbour did they drop French colours and substitute for them the German naval ensign.

Kristiansand fell. There was nothing in the inner harbour to stand against the strength that the Germans had secured in its very heart. The two destroyers of the "Sleipner" class were little over half the size of the Germans, and were directly under their guns by the time the exchange of flags was complete. Kristiansand surrendered, and with it surrendered the units of the Norwegian Navy that remained.

But against that loss there was a balance—two destroyers and a transport had been sunk and the powerful German cruiser *Karlsruhe* had been badly damaged by the fire of the shore batteries.

VIII

Stavanger was the first big port of the four attacked along the western coast of Norway. The force used here was perhaps the lightest of all the German invasion flotillas, but the defences of Stavanger were almost non-existent. Upon that the Germans based their appreciation. One of the four small modern destroyers that Norway had, the *Aeger*, was operating near the mouth of the great Boknfjord and she sank the German transport *Roda* of 8,000 tons, loaded principally with anti-aircraft guns. She scarcely survived her victim.

In the dawn the Sola aerodrome, close to Stavanger, was taken by German parachute troops in large numbers. The small Norwegian force defending the port itself withdrew, and the Luftwaffe was free to operate. The *Aeger* was one of its first targets. Heavily bombed almost as soon as the light was clear enough for operation, she was hit in the engine-room and was run ashore by her commanding officer and scuttled. Eight of her crew were killed, the rest escaped.

Across the fjord at Haugesund the *Draug*, of about the same tonnage as the "Sleipner" class (but completed as early as 1910 and the oldest destroyer in service probably in any navy in the world), captured the big German supply ship *Main* of 7,500 tons, loaded with mines for the sowing of the captured harbours. With the superb impudence that was afterwards to become a first characteristic of the Norwegian Navy, the *Draug* proceeded to take her prize away. Behind her all the Norwegian coast was in the flames of war. Oslo was falling. She had picked up the messages of Bergen and Trondheim, Kristian-

sand and Stavanger. There was nowhere for her to take her prize save out across the northern sea to England. She set to seaward.

But the German authorities had picked up the first despairing calls of the *Main* as her tiny opponent bullied her into surrender. By dawn the Luftwaffe was searching. Early in the day they found. The *Main* was bombed by her own aircraft. She did not sink, but her crew abandoned her in a panic, and the *Draug* sank her by gunfire. The *Draug* picked up sixty of her survivors and brought them over to England.

IX

Bergen, the principal port of western Norway, lies inside a complex of islands. It can be approached from the south by what is known as the southern inlet through Korsfjord or from the northern end of the islands by the Fédjefjord—the northern inlet. The city itself lies on the Byfjord, which runs eastward out of its leads.

At the southern entrance there were seven naval vessels—four of them auxiliary patrol vessels, two torpedo-boats, the *Storm* and the *Sael* of 90 tons, and the minelayer *Tyr*.

At 1.15 on the morning of April 9th the duty guardship *Manger* sighted enemy vessels approaching from the south. She made the challenge and, when it was disregarded, fired a warning shot, at the same time sending up two red lights to warn the other vessels farther in. A loud-hailer from the German ships called out, "Sei ruhig" ("Keep quiet"), and the force moved up the fjord at slow speed.

The minelayer *Tyr*, lying well up the fjord, picked up the warning and, already under way, immediately moved into the centre of the channel about Lerøyosen and began to drop a minefield across the route by which the enemy was expected to enter. She laid seven mines altogether before the leading German ship reached the vicinity, but none of these was detonated.

Meanwhile the torpedo-boat *Storm*—forty years old and barely 90 tons—attacked the leading German vessel and secured a hit with one torpedo. Tragically, it failed to explode.

The German force consisted of the cruisers *Köln* and *Königsberg*, 6,000-ton ships mounting nine 5.9-inch guns and sister ships to the *Karlsruhe*. With them was the *Bremse*, sister to the *Brummer* (which two hours later was to sink in the narrows of Dröbak) and a screen of torpedo-boats with minesweepers.

Still moving slowly, feeling their way up the complicated navigation of the fjords, with their sweepers operating ahead of them, the German force pressed in to the entrance of the Byfjord. The fortress above Bergen itself opened fire as the leading German ships rounded the point at four o'clock. An immediate signal was made in English from

the German flagship. It read, "Stop shooting." But there appeared to be no doubt in the mind of the Norwegian commander of the fortress and firing was continued. The *Königsberg* was seriously hit in this phase, but the firing was insufficient to stop the force and troops were landed. In a brief struggle the batteries were taken from the rear, and Bergen, left without defences, surrendered.

Immediately the troops were ashore the main units of the invasion force put out to sea again, but the *Königsberg*, damaged by the guns of the fortress, was unable to accompany them and made fast to the quayside in Bergen harbour. That news was brought to the outer world by Allied reconnaissance planes. A little after daybreak on the morning of April 10th Swordfish of the British Fleet Air Arm came in on Bergen harbour from the sea. At 7.30 a.m. a bomb hit the *Königsberg* amidships.

The New York freighter *Flying Fish* was lying close to her in Bergen harbour with a German armed guard on board.

One bomb [said her Master, Captain Wollaston], struck her squarely amidships between the funnels. We saw clouds of smoke and at 9 a.m. there was an explosion. The cruiser started sinking by the head. Flames were leaping a hundred feet in the air as she sank deeper and deeper. Her stern went up into the air, showing the propeller, and fifty minutes later she capsized and sank as columns of smoke rose above her.

The Germans were paying for their captures.

X

North of Bergen, where the Trondheimsfjord cuts so deep as almost to divide the north of Norway from the south, lies Trondheim city, barely fifty miles from the Swedish frontier. Possession of Trondheim would cut North Norway from the South, it would complete the encirclement of all the industrial and the principal agricultural areas, severing the body of Norway from its limb.

At 3 a.m. on the morning of the 9th the cruiser *Hipper* (10,000 tons, mounting eight 8-inch guns, twelve 4-inch anti-aircraft and twelve torpedo tubes, with a speed of 32 knots and the qualities of a small battle-cruiser) swept into Trondheimsfjord with four destroyers of the "Roeder" class (ships of 1,811 tons, so big, so heavily armoured as to be almost light cruisers). They went past the tiny guard ship at twenty-five knots. By the time she got the warning through they were in range of the searchlights of the outer forts. They were picked up instantly, and even as the leading ships came within the beam the fortress on the eastern headland opened fire.

At once the Germans answered the fire—and here occurred one of those fantastic chances that rule battle and the fate of nations. The

first salvo from the *Hipper* cut the cable which supplied the searchlight with electricity. The light went out. Before the damage could be repaired the German Fleet was past, and Trondheim was virtually lost. The city was unprotected. With their main force clear of the line of fire of the outer batteries, troops were landed to take the fortress from the rear, and though for many hours a handful of the Agdenes garrison held out against enormously superior forces of the enemy, the issue was scarcely in doubt.

One destroyer, the *Theodor Riedel*—the class was named after the "heroes" of the Nazi revolution—was hit and ran aground on the coast of the fjord.

At 3.15 the battle for Trondheim was over and southern Norway was surrounded—north, west, south and east.

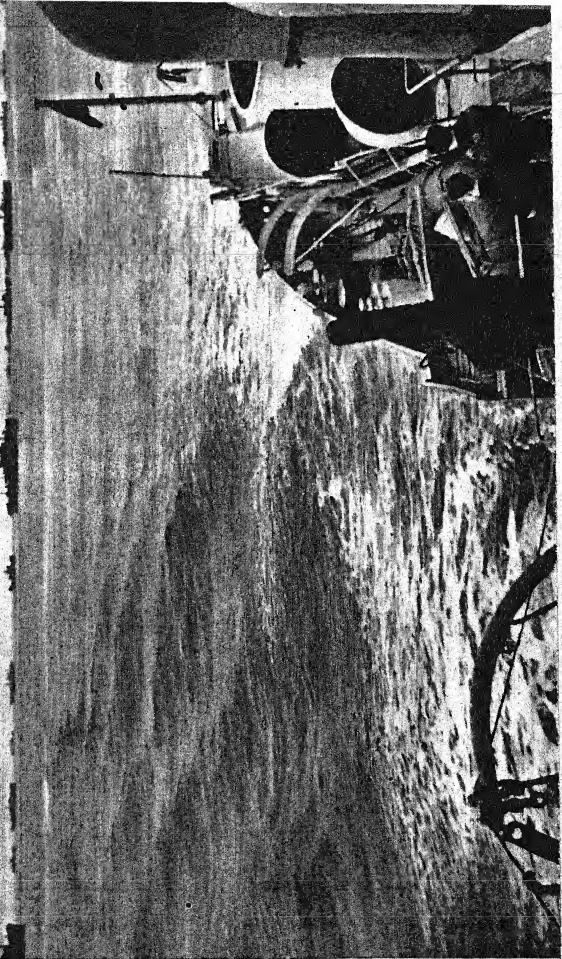
XI

There was a sixth invasion, Narvik. And at this sixth—the last and most dramatic of them all—heavy tragedy fell upon the little Norwegian Fleet. To Narvik, more than a thousand miles from the Oslofjord round the deep-indented coast, the Norwegian Admiralty had sent the two coast defence ships, *Eidsvold* and *Norge*. For many years these ships had been listed as coast defence ships only. They were not fit to take the sea. They had not been fit to lie in the line of battle for twenty years. But in the Vestfjord—the vast indentation that, running inside the Lofoten Islands to the mainland, continues up the Ofotfjord to Narvik—it was hoped that they might meet what challenge came their way. When they were posted there there was no imagination in the mind of man that they would have to fight a battle.

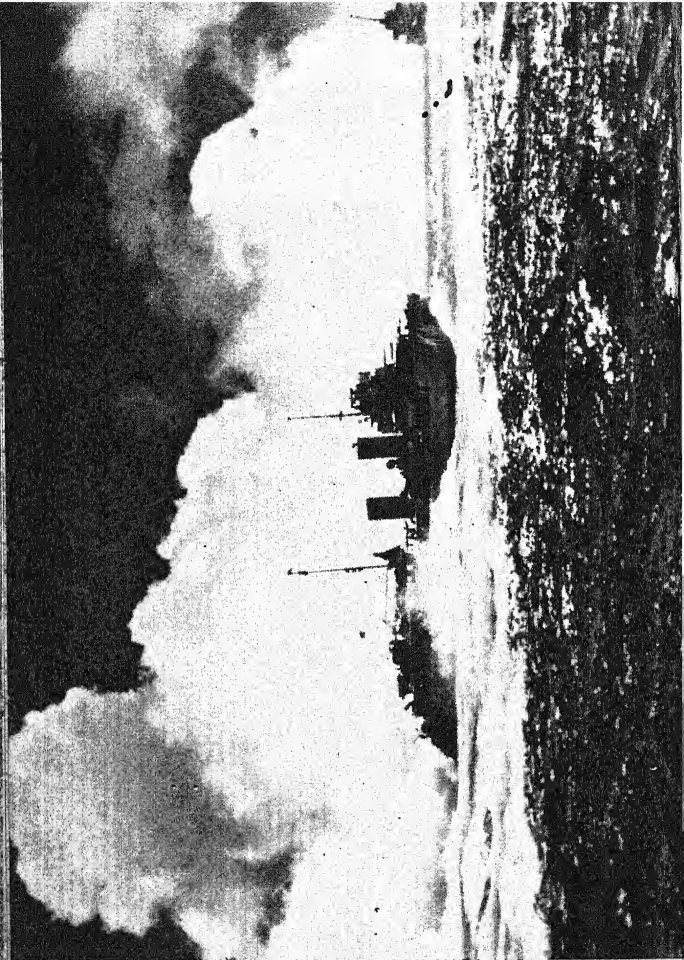
Narvik lies well to the northward of the Arctic Circle. The world knows its importance, as an ice-free port for the shipment of Swedish ore, to the German economy of war. On the night of April 8th to *Eidsvold* and *Norge* came the warning that a German naval force was believed by the British Admiralty to be heading north for Narvik.

There were other ships in and about the long fjords of the Narvik area: two submarines, B. 1 and B. 3, and a number of small auxiliary vessels. At 3.30 a.m., just as the Oscarsborg fortress opened fire upon the *Blücher* far down to the south, the guard-ship *Senja* sighted the leader of a force of ten destroyers of the "Roeder" class.

Warned by the *Senja*, the *Eidsvold*, which had moved to the Ofotfjord just outside Narvik on the first report of the possibility of an enemy attack, attempted to intercept. After an exchange of signals the German destroyers lay to while a motor dinghy brought across an officer of the senior ship to demand permission to enter the harbour,



A Norwegian corvette escorting an Atlantic convoy : part of their great work in the Battle of the Atlantic.



Netherlands destroyers in a smoke screen : H.N.M.S. "Kortenaar" in the foreground.

and for the surrender of the ships of the defence, from the captain of *Eidsvold*. This demand was peremptorily refused.

The German officer went back to his boat; her engine started; she drew swiftly away from the side of the old coast defence vessel; and the moment she was out of the line of fire the officer in her stern sheets fired a light from a V&V pistol. It is clear that the plan had been prepared in every possible detail. Instantly torpedoes were fired from the leading German destroyers. Before *Eidsvold* could fire a single gun she was hit, her magazine exploded, and she sank. Under the falling snow and in the icy waters of the fjord all except eight men of her ship's company went down with her.

Instantly the German destroyers went ahead on their engines, racing up the fjord for Narvik. But even in the moment of her death *Eidsvold* had sent a signal to the *Norge* to fight. As the German line opened the headland of the Beisfjord the *Norge* fired. Despite her ancient guns, the elementary fire-control of forty years ago, the primitive loading gear, *Norge* fought gallantly. One of the leading destroyers was hit almost at once and sank: a second destroyer was badly damaged. But at five o'clock in the half-light of a morning flecked with snow, with the clouds low over the hills that fringed the fjord and that rolled back to the ships the deep echoes of their guns, *Norge* was hit repeatedly by torpedoes and sank, taking with her a hundred and ten men of her complement of two hundred.

Narvik was left defenceless to the enemy. And, that their triumph might be more complete, the colonel in command of the troops—in defiance of the orders of General Fleischer—offered no opposition to the enemy.

Of the two submarines that were left, the B. 1 was sunk by her own crew at Liland in the Ofotfjord; the other, the B. 3, escaped to northern Norway.

The sea battle of Norway was done. Begun in heroism, it ended in the stark tragedy of the snow and the ice waters of the fjords.

XII

Retribution for that tragedy was swift. The German invasion of Norway was a brilliant essay in naval planning and organisation. It succeeded brilliantly. If the capture and subjugation of Norway had been the sole object of the German war, it might even have gone down to history as a masterpiece among the world's invasions. As an essay in the exercise of sea power it was a failure. It may even be that historians of the future will say that the successful invasion of Norway lost Germany the war.

In the invasion of Norway Germany lost the nice balance of her surface fleet. *Blücher* was sunk, the *Brummer* sunk, and the *Deutsch-*

land and *Emden* damaged by the fortress of Oscarsborg. The *Karlsruhe*, limping away from Kristiansand to the shelter of a German dockyard, was sighted ten miles off the Norwegian coast by the British submarine *Truant* and sunk with heavy loss of life. The *Königsberg*, so damaged by the Bergen forts as to be unable to leave the Bergen harbour when the others left, was sunk there by aircraft of the British Fleet Air Arm. Three light destroyers and a *Raumboot* sank to the guns of the *Olav Tryggvason* and the forts of Kristiansand. One heavy destroyer was sunk by the *Norge*, and two others damaged by the *Norge* and the forts of Trondheim.

In the same morning of snow and sleet H.M.S. *Renown* fell in with the two fast Nazi battle-cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*. In an action that was fought at the extreme limit of visibility in the driving snow, *Scharnhorst* was heavily damaged by the guns of *Renown*.

In that afternoon—Wednesday, April 9—the Second British Destroyer Flotilla under Captain Warburton-Lee in H.M.S. *Hardy*, patrolling off the mouth of the Vestfjord south of the Lofoten Islands went in to Narvik. There were nine German destroyers in Narvik, all of them heavier ships, more strongly armed than the five destroyers of the Second Flotilla. But in the darkness of the night *Hardy* led the Flotilla up the Vestfjord and into the narrow channel of the Ofotfjord. At 4.30 the next morning they were off Narvik. The world knows that gallant action. One German destroyer was sunk, three others left burning, and a number of transports and troopships of the landing were destroyed before their material could be put ashore.

There has been endless speculation as to the reasons for the apparent stupidity of the German delay at Narvik. To have left a valuable force a thousand miles and more from the nearest support seemed at the time to be the tactic of suicide. Actually the German destroyers were so short of fuel after this long run to the northward that they had to await the arrival of a tanker to refuel them before commencing the return voyage to the south. That tanker, the *Kattegat*, was sent with characteristic German thoroughness to reach Narvikfjord on April 9th. In the Vestfjord she was intercepted by Norwegian patrol vessels and sunk. No oil reached Narvik except upon the cold surface of the tide. The destroyers were held immobilised, and the German planning did not have sufficient elasticity to enable fresh supplies to reach them in time.

At noon on the Saturday the disaster to the German Navy was made complete. H.M.S. *Warspite* with a force of modern British destroyers raced up the narrows of the Ofotfjord, and the whole destroyer force that had taken Narvik was battered, burned and sunk.

In the campaign of Norway the German Navy lost approximately one-third of its total strength of cruisers and destroyers, and of the

remaining vessels, of transports and smaller craft, many were sunk or damaged.

When, a month later, Holland was attacked and the great *débâcle* of the west began, Germany was unable to exploit the seaward end of her success. A strong destroyer force might have played havoc with the evacuation of Dunkirk. A balanced fleet such as she had possessed before the raid on Oslo might have been sufficient after Dunkirk—when Britain had lost enormously in her destroyers and seventy of the small remainder were in harbour for repair—to ensure a landing on the coast of England under cover of the Luftwaffe. But all through May, all through the disasters of June, Germany remembered the *Karlsruhe* and the *Königsberg*, the *Blücher* and the destroyers of Narvik, the cruisers in dry dock and the torpedo-boats unserviceable.

That was the price that Germany paid for the scintillating brilliance of her success. But that was not all the price.

Dismembered, surrounded, battered from the air, from the land and from the sea, Norway fought on. At 7.30 on the morning of the 9th the King and the Royal Family, the Norwegian Government and the Storting had begun the amazing journey of the battle of Norway. With them went the Norwegian Admiralty. At 7.30 the Norwegian Fleet was a navy without an Admiralty. Even the thin links of the wireless, the telegraph and the telephone were broken. By evening, when at Hamar the Storting held the first of its emergency meetings, the Norwegian Admiralty was an Admiralty without a fleet.

From Oslofjord, from Horten, from Tönsberg, from Kristiansand, no single naval vessel escaped. From Stavanger the *Aeger*, fresh from her triumph with the *Main*, escaped to sink even while the Admiralty was in the train. From the south entrance to Bergen the minelayer *Tyr*, the old torpedo-boat *Sael*, the auxiliary patrol vessels *Haus*, *Lindaas* and *Alversund*, slipped out to the Hardangerfjord. From Bergen itself and from the northern inlet another handful fled to Sognefjord. The *Draug* was on her way to Britain with her prize. One ship, the *Heilhorn*, escaped from Trondheim to northern Norway. One submarine escaped from Narvik. There were left only the outer ships of the neutrality patrol along the northern coast. Norway's Navy was broken.

Yet, even as its King faced the bombing of the enemy, even as its army—lit by the spirit of General Ruge—challenged the invader, the little Norwegian ships fought on. One by one they were picked off by German air power in the fjords of their escape. The *Sleipner*—the one modern destroyer to survive—fought gallantly along the coast, and is credited with the destruction of five German aircraft. The *Froya*, attempting to escape out of Trondheimsfjord, was attacked by German artillery from the shore, damaged and run aground. She was scuttled by her crew.

The torpedo-boat *Sael* was sunk in action^f in Hardangerfjord on April 19th. On the 20th the *Stegg* followed her. The minelayer *Tyr* was captured by the Germans at Uskedal on the same day. She was later sunk by the Norwegian Fleet Air Arm with a German crew on board. On April 26th the *Garm* was sunk by aircraft in the Sognefjord. On May 2nd the minesweepers *Djerv* and *Dristig* were scuttled by their own crews.

So the story goes on.

Meanwhile the little Fleet Air Arm worked with the small ships in a superb self-sacrifice. There were only thirty-two 'planes in the Fleet Air Arm when the campaign began, twenty-four reconnaissance 'planes and eight German Heinkels. One of the reconnaissance 'planes brought down a German bomber over Horten, and others from Bergen tried to bomb the invaders that already were safe in harbour. Those that escaped from Horten and from Kristiansand joined with the Bergen force, and when the last of their bases fell to the enemy they flew to secret fjords and frozen lakes and worked from there.

Ammunition was short; most of their bombs they had had to leave on their abandoned aerodromes; high octane fuel became scarce and disappeared; spare parts and ground crews were non-existent—but still they fought on. They helped the torpedo-boats in their attacks on German transport lines. They bombed German minelayers in the Sognefjord. They reconnoitred and bombed German naval forces up and down the west of Norway.

Lieutenant K. Kjos captured a German Arado 'plane in a fjord inside Kristiansund and used it thereafter—finally, when the campaign was over, flying it to Scotland.

It was gallant, but it was tragic. In every way the old 'planes of the Norwegian Air Force were out-gunned and out-classed. In the end, with petrol almost exhausted, the ammunition and bombs gone, those that could still fly took off for Scotland and the Shetland Islands.

But their work was not in vain. Between them and the little ships that had escaped, and in the first hours of the fighting, the Germans had lost 100,000 tons of transport shipping with all that that implied of war materials and men.

XIII

Slowly the Norwegian Army was falling back, and with it moved its Government and its King. From the very first hours of the flight from Oslo King Haakon had been the object of the special fury of the Hun. The saga of the Norwegian King and his Government will yet be added to the great songs of Norway. The bombing at Kjeller was directed against the aerodrome. At Elversum and at a dozen places in the course of that long journey it was directed against the

King. There have been few greater, few more bitter honours than that bombing,—few more significant acknowledgments of the meaning of a modern King to the heart of his people. By his death alone the Germans believed they could secure the surrender of the spirit of Norway.

He did not die.

On April 14th the first British Expeditionary Force was landed at Andalsnes and at Namsos British troops were put ashore with light equipment. But the speed of the German advance, operating as it did from all round the perimeter of southern Norway, was too great for effective intervention except in the greatest strength—and great strength was impossible with the Allied commitments on the mainland of Europe. The intervention failed: this is not the place to discuss those failures.

By April 21st the Norwegian Admiralty was established at Molde, and from there it made a gallant effort to get order into what had become the guerilla warfare of the fjords. But by April 28th the situation in southern Norway had deteriorated to such an extent that the Allied Governments gave notice that they would have to withdraw their forces from Gudbrandsdal and Romsdal.

Late on the night of April 29th, with Molde blazing from end to end, the King and the Crown Prince left the town in the British cruiser *Glasgow* for northern Norway. On the 30th the staff of the Admiralty left for Scapa Flow in a British transport. At Scapa they transferred to a destroyer and headed for Tromsø almost at the tip of the North Cape.

There was little for the remnants of the Norwegian Navy to do in these later days. Across the Vestfjord and in the area of the Lofoten Islands the British Navy, covering its land forces operating in the Narvik area and in the Nordland province, had established an absolute block. The German Navy was in no shape to challenge that establishment. From Nordland to Finmark the waters were free save for the incessant scouring of the German air. But there was much work to do in the transport of troops and material about the fjords, and the remaining ships in the Norwegian Navy worked ceaselessly beside the British in the task.

There were even captures in this time. There was the new German trawler that came to Honningsvaag, and was captured by the dentist of Honningsvaag with thirty fishermen in two small boats, who boarded the ship and took her crew by surprise. They sailed her south to Tromsø.

Fighting went on, but far to the south the Germans thrust again. on May 10th they broke without declaration of war the neutrality of another country, flooding over the frontier of Holland as the sea breaks over a battered dyke. Holland—Belgium—France . . . the succession was swift, brutal and terrible. Narvik in the far north was captured almost as Dunkirk fell. Even as Norwegians, French, Poles and

British swept into the little town they were building emplacements along the beaches of England to fight off an invasion of the heart of Britain. Norway had to be abandoned to her fate.

On June 7th King Haakon left the soil of Norway. "We who issue this appeal at the moment we are compelled to leave the soil of Norway, we are determined to give all our strength, our lives and all we have, to fight for Norway."

On June 8th the Norwegian Admiralty followed H.M.S. *Devonshire* and their King out of Tromsø harbour. With them sailed the navy of Norway. To Commanding Admiral Diesen were left the fishery protection vessels *Fridtjof Nansen* (1,300 tons, armed with two 4-inch guns), the *Heimdal* (which in 1905 had carried King Haakon to his throne in Norway) and the *Nordkapp*. With them were the armed auxiliaries *Syrian*, *Thorodd*, *Nordhav II*, *Hval V*, *Börtind* and the ex-German trawler *Honningsvaag*. And with them was one other—a ship new-come from the dead—the submarine B. 1 that had been sunk by her captain in Ofotfjord. On the occupation of Narvik she had been raised and steamed to Tromsø: the omen and the promise and the sign of a new Norwegian Navy.

How much of this disaster was due to treachery? In the days that followed it, when communications with Norway were impossible and news came garbled through neutral countries and through Germany itself, there was much talk of treachery. It served too to explain the monstrous swiftness of the tragedy. Yet it seems probable now, on cool examination of the evidence, that there was little of treachery. In the first shock of the occupation the defences were not ready. It may have been that in some of the messages that were sent to the commanders of the forts and of naval areas there was the working of a traitor, but when Horten surrendered the Germans obtained an immediate mastery of the machine of the Norwegian Admiralty. At Narvik the commander of the garrison abandoned his duty. But only in one or two insignificant cases in the naval vessels or in the ports themselves is there evidence of the slightest undermining of the morale or of the patriotism of the Norwegian Navy.

CHAPTER II

I

ON the 9th April 1940 the Norwegian Merchant Navy totalled four million eight hundred and fifty thousand tons. One thousand one hundred and eighty-two vessels accounted for four and a half millions of this total. It was the second largest ocean-going fleet in the world.

In the whole question of the conquest of Norway and in the con-

tinued resistance of that most gallant country, the Norwegian Merchant Navy plays a predominant part. It was the greatest prize of all for Germany. If nearly five million tons of shipping could have been denied at one stroke to the Allies, Germany's submarine campaign—planned cynically long before the war, already in full operation—might have succeeded. It seems possible that Hitler's advisers believed in the days before April 9th that if Norway by whatever suasion of power or brutality be persuaded to at least an outer semblance of a willing co-operation, that fleet might be recalled to Norway and the use of the Axis. Almost the first action of the Oslo radio station, when it was taken over by the Germans, was on April 10th to broadcast in the name of the shipping owners of the Norwegian lines an instruction to all Norwegian ships abroad to seek neutral ports, preferably Spanish or Italian, and wait there for orders.

The story of how the Norwegian Minister in London, Mr. Colban, and Mr. Hysing Olsen, the representative of the Norwegian Ship-owners' Association, stopped that attempt—of how the masters of Norwegian vessels and their crews (they totalled thirty thousand men between them) treated the German orders with contempt—how not one ship of the fleet abroad gave itself up to the direction of the Axis—is among the greatest pages of the history of Norway's fight. They knew only that the homeland was invaded, that their homes and their families were under the threat of the German Army, that in the peaceful valleys of central Norway battle was in progress, that in the fjords men were drowning and in the harbours German soldiers were leaping ashore. But there were no Quislings in the merchant fleet of Norway.

Not all the five million tons of shipping came to Britain. There was eight hundred thousand tons in the Norwegian ports; in Danish, German and in Swedish harbours. Half of that was coastwise tonnage. Five hundred and seventy-six thousand tons only were ocean-going ships. That prize Germany got. But even there ships were scuttled, bombed, run aground. On balance with the hundred thousand tons of German shipping that the Norwegians themselves destroyed in the course of the invasion, with the ships that were sunk by British surface craft, British bombers and British submarines, Germany made perilously little on the deal.

Meanwhile in the hands of Nortraship, the strange, vital organisation that grew overnight in a couple of upstairs rooms in Leadenhall Street, there was a magnificent reservoir for the "Kongelige Norske Marine."

II

Ten ships escaped from northern Norway. In British waters they found *Sleipner*, which alone of the little 550-ton modern destroyers had won her way across the North Sea. *Draug* was with her, and one

auxiliary vessel, the *Bjerk*: thirteen ships in all, and only one of them—the *Sleipner*—a modern warship. Some of them were hardly seaworthy. The *Heimdal* had been condemned to be abandoned—she was only brought over at the urgent demand of her own crew.

And out of that material the sailor King of Norway and his Admiralty built up a navy.

Britain was short of ships—desperately short of them—in that disastrous month of June. She had nothing to lend and nothing to give to the Navy of Norway to carry on the fight. She needed help in a dozen directions, and some of that help Norway, with her huge Merchant Navy, could provide. Out of the whaling fleet the Norwegian Admiralty set to work immediately to make minesweepers and patrol vessels—the little whalecatchers were specially suited to the work. Some of the bigger ones were potential escort vessels. At once the work of conversion began. It continued until to-day the Norwegian Navy has, despite the losses of war, more than thirty auxiliary vessels—converted trawlers and whalecatchers—that have swept mines from Iceland to the coasts of Palestine, and sixty-seven others have been taken over by the British and Dominion Navies for the same purpose.

To man them the Norwegian Admiralty took men from the merchant ships, naval reservists who had not been called up in the early stages of the war, volunteers who wanted a more active part in the defeat of the enemy that had crushed their homeland. Between two and three hundred officers and men of the Navy had left with the main withdrawal from Tromsø. Between them and the Merchant Navy the first needs were satisfied.

And even as they began the conversion of the snub-nosed whalecatchers to the harsh duties of war, there began from Norway the superb story of the escape. I do not use the plural advisedly for this is one escape. Whether it be by rowing-boat, as some men have come; whether it be over the mountains to Sweden and through Sweden to Russia and from Russia to England; whether it be by air, as some have come away; whether it be through flooding down to the beaches as the raiding ships go in, it is all one escape—the expression of the hate and the spirit of a free people, of a people who cannot and will not accept the domination of a foreign power, however strong, however brutal. The stories of the men and women who left the fjords of Norway in their little boats are stories that the memory of the world will put alongside the sagas. They will match them with the *Flatey Book*, with the *Saga of Eric the Red*, with the *Heimskringla*.

III

Some of these stories of escape have been published. Most of them have not—nor, while Norway lies under the hand of Reichs-

kommissar Terboven and the Nazi rule, is it desirable that those which have not been published should be given to the world. But of those that have already seen the light of day a handful will show the quality of them all.

There was a woman—the name is a common one in Norway—whose husband had escaped earlier at peril of his life. She followed him with her three sons, Jan, Leif and Alf. They reached the Faroes in a fishing-boat.

There were thirteen men and a girl who came over after six days of bitter battling with the weather in an open motor fishing vessel.

There was a man who, with his wife and child, landed on the Scottish coast, having rowed two hundred and twenty miles from the coast near Bergen. There were bullet-holes in the boat where the 'planes of the escape patrol (that the men of the fjords had forced upon the Germans) had hit the skiff. The weather was autumn. They arrived on September 23rd, 1940.

There were three Merchant Navy officers who were part of the underground organisation that has throughout the occupation defied the Nazi rule and carried hope and comfort to a people defying slavery. It was desirable that codes for communicating with the organisation should be sent to England. These three volunteered to bring them. On the 27th September a British submarine, patrolling in the North Sea, sighted a small sailing boat. As she surfaced to capture its crew, the Norwegians sighted her and thought her to be a U-boat. Working desperately, they destroyed the copies of the codes. The submarine was just beginning her patrol and for fourteen days these three men lived aboard her while she harried the German shipping that moved up and down the Norwegian coast-line, and while they sat inside the hollow of her hull they worked out the codes from memory once more.

There were two boys who took an Esquimaux kayak, barely sixteen inches in beam, and paddled it until they were at the very edge of exhaustion. She was too small for them to bring any supply of food; they had only a few bottles of water, and they set out into the unknown with that for provision. They were picked up very near death by a British destroyer on patrol.

Some were not so fortunate. Many have died in that traffic—died from the accident of the sea, facing it in inadequate craft or with inadequate preparation. Many have been killed by attacks from the anti-escape patrols. Some have been recaptured. In December of 1941 ten patriots were executed. In March of 1942 five men in a sailing yacht were intercepted in the North Sea. All five were shot. In May of 1942 fifteen out of seventeen men who bought a motor boat for the journey to England were executed by order of Reichskommissar

Terboven. Those are a few only of the lost men who never came to England.

Sometimes the escapes were on a more elaborate scale than these individual breaks for freedom. On March 16th of 1942 it was announced by the Oslo radio that the ship *Galtesund*, Norwegian coastal vessel running on the regular passenger and cargo service between Oslo and Bergen, had disappeared. The *Galtesund* left the Flekkefjord on the south coast of Norway on Sunday, March 15th, at 5 p.m. An hour later she was scheduled to call at the next port on her route to Bergen. She did not arrive at the scheduled time and within a very few minutes she was reported missing. The search, which began at once, did not find her.

As she moved up the coast from pier to little pier of the small fjord towns, young men joined the *Galtesund* in ones and twos. They had found out before the passage that she carried fuel enough to reach the British coast, and when the whole company had assembled with the arrival of the last man at Flekkefjord, they divided into three sections. One party took the bridge, one the saloon, and the third the engine-room, and at the point of the revolver they took control of the ship. Being Norwegians there were inevitably among them men who could handle a ship, and they stood out at once for the emptiness of the North Sea.

Within a few hours—they had judged their time carefully and accurately—she was out of sight of the Norwegian coast and under the cover of darkness. On the following morning British reconnaissance planes sighted her heading south-west over the North Sea. A trawler was sent out to meet her and bring her in through the minefields, and on March 17th she arrived safely on the English coast with cargo, crew and passengers intact.

These must serve. They are the skeletons of a saga. About the bare bones of fact lie "a hundred desperate stratagems"—the petrol gathered illegally and with an infinite difficulty, the provisions smuggled under the nose of Quisling and of Nazi, the motors carefully tuned to the very pitch of enterprise, the sails and rigging patched and repaired and strengthened against the winds of the North Sea.

We can gather the meaning of those escapes; we have a rule to scale them by. On October 23rd, 1941, Reichskommissar Terboven decreed the death penalty for anyone, man or woman, attempting to escape the coast of Norway. But, when the peril of three hundred miles of sea, the dangers of a small craft and open waters, of winter gales and the icy cold of the seas below the Arctic Circle, cannot shut off the spirit of the people, could a decree? The escapes went on. They are going on to-day—regularised, standardised, built almost into a traffic, a secret will-o'-the-wisp traffic that has bewildered, infuriated and baffled the German tyranny.

And out of that material, out of the men who came by Cape Town and the North Cape, by a thousand ways each more fantastic than the last, the Royal Norwegian Navy has built up its people. To-day it numbers four thousand five hundred petty officers and ratings and seven hundred officers. Fewer than three hundred came from Tromsø in the last withdrawal.

IV

And with the growth of manpower the new ships came. In September of 1940 the American Government transferred to England fifty "over age" destroyers. They were old, ships of the last war, ships that had lain in reserve for the best part of a score of years. The Americans called them "tin can" destroyers. But Britain with eighty thousand miles of sea lanes to guard and the French Navy lost to her, with the Mediterranean dominated—on paper, always on paper—by the Italian Navy, and with the enormous commitments of the munitions traffic to the British Isles in the race to outpace Hitler, was in the most desperate need of anything that floated. The ships that had been in dockyard hands after Dunkirk week had mostly been repaired, but they were spread from Britain to Gibraltar, from Gibraltar to Alexandria, from Alexandria to Aden and the Red Sea. They were hunting submarines off the Cape Verde Islands and outside Sierra Leone; they were searching the Atlantic from Iceland to the Faroes, from England to the coasts of Spain. It was a race between the naval strength of England and the building of U-boats—and in that race anything that could move fast and that would carry a depth charge and an Asdic instrument was a lap gained. Fifty destroyers were of inestimable value.

Even on the scale of the last war manning the flush-deck destroyers carried a hundred and twenty men. With modern gear added to their old complexity they carried about a hundred and thirty-five. They needed at once nearly seven thousand men, and even the reserves of the British Navy were stretched to the utmost to man them. Norway had already a reserve of manpower, and she wanted ships. Four were transferred to her: *Mansfield* (ex *Evans*), *Bath* (ex *Hopewell*), *St. Albans* (ex *Thomas*) and *Newport* (ex *Sigourney*). They were ships of 1,100 tons—twice the size of any destroyer that the Royal Norwegian Navy had had before. They carried four 4-inch guns, had a speed of thirty-five knots and were three hundred and fifteen feet overall. They were completed in 1919.

Norway had an ocean-going Navy again.

CHAPTER III

I

THE ex-American destroyers were the training school of the new Norwegian Navy, and, while the training went on, they did admirable work in the common cause. As soon as the brief settling-down period was over, as soon as their crews had worked up their gunnery off Scapa Flow, carried out their torpedo attacks and the rest of it, and minor adjustments had been made to the ships, they went on the arduous, incessant, harassing task of the Battle of the Atlantic. They worked mainly on the north-western approaches, covering convoys from mid-Atlantic to the Scottish coast, from Iceland down to the Clyde, and all the waters in between.

It is not possible to give at this date details of all the submarines damaged or sunk by Norwegian ships in the course of the war. The policy of the British Admiralty of secrecy over submarine sinkings except in outstanding cases is one that proved in the last war to have terrific effect on the psychological make-up of the submarine crews, and in this war also there are not lacking signs already which indicate that it has played its part. But in those first difficult months of service—the Norwegians went to sea on their first convoy duty in a winter gale—they learnt their trade, and by the decorations that the captains and men of their ships earned in those early days can be judged something of their success. Thirty-five officers and ratings have already received British decorations in the course of the war, and in the main those have been given for German submarines sent on their last dive. They were efficient.

II

I joined H. Nor. M.S. *St. Albans* in the turning basin of a great London dock in the December of 1941. She had just completed a refit to which she had been brought by sea damage. Coming down from Iceland with a convoy she had been heavily battered by the brutal northern gales of the late autumn. She had to go into dockyard hands to repair the damage, and the opportunity was taken for a general reconditioning. They were very old, these ships. Nobody—least of all the American Navy—will deny that they had their faults. But they came at perhaps the most critical moment of all the war, and they played their part magnificently despite defects.

With our camouflage shining with new paint we went down the river. And I remember the strange pathos of the scene in her refitted wardroom when, for the first time, they switched on the electric fire. It had a little light that flickered under imitation coals. There had

been no fireplace, no hearth, before, in the strict simplicities of the 1918 buildings; but now these Norwegians, these exiles of a treacherous war, had for the first time a hearth of their own—a home place.

They were a curious assortment. Commander Storheill, her captain—short, square, confident, superbly cheerful—was “Old Navy.” At the other end of the scale one of his officers had been on the terrible night of April 8th a young midshipman just beginning his training. He had brought out from central Norway codes for the Norwegian Admiralty at Molde in a rucksack on his back, travelling first by motor-cycle—harassed by German planes and sniped at by German machine-guns—until the snow became too deep and he was compelled to abandon his motor-cycle, borrow skis, and come out over the mountain passes on foot. Her doctor had escaped from the coast of his homeland in an open boat. Her Lieutenant (E) had come through Russia and round by the Cape of Good Hope.

That was the Norwegian Navy—a compost of adventure, of escape; a force of men made up of a hundred strange, fantastic difficulties. Their names alone held the normalcy of old Norway—Storheill, Johannessen, Snekkestad, Lundberg, Dahl Johansen, Goldberg. They covered Norway from the Agder to the Finmark; and with them their men (the stoker ratings and the petty officers, the able seamen, the gunners, the wireless ratings) covered the provinces of that long coast. That old American ship was Norway in little—a beaten nation that, beaten, still fought on—that had never, and that would never, acknowledge defeat.

We sailed (after three days spent in testing degaussing and working up new equipment and in clearing up the last defects of the engine room) up the War Channel to the north in company with a British destroyer. As evening came we heard the throb of aircraft motors overhead, coming in over the War Channel from the North Sea—enemy aircraft. I saw Norway that had been cheerful and almost frivolous go into war dress with the first clang of the alarm.

The other destroyer left us while we were still at action stations, heading into the Humber, and as we brought Spurn Head abeam we saw the Hull anti-aircraft guns go into action and, clear of the river, another set of guns—the destroyer that had left us answering the attack of the enemy. They left us alone, and we went on at speed to the north, while behind us the night flickered with brilliance and in the sky the little stars of the anti-aircraft shells had their brief moment of life and died upon the moment.

The war had come to us again, and the War Channel—the long, narrow passageway down the coast of England that faces the coast of Germany across the brief stretch of the North Sea—was full of shipping. We passed convoy after convoy in the dark. By dawn we were off Aberdeen, and straightway there was another convoy, a long line

of ships : Great Lakes freighters from Canada, deep-sea tramps, oil tankers, ore ships, timber ships, food ships—the life-line of England. They passed us under the escort of the coastwise destroyers, the superb old “V”s and “W”s, contemporary with these Americans of the “tin can” class, that had borne the burden of the east coast work, that had given magnificent service in a dozen other theatres of war, the greatest-hearted class of destroyers that perhaps ever was built in the history of the little ships.

And with them we passed *Sleipner* of the *Kongelige Norske Marine*, the gallant little ship that had fought her way out of the battle of the fjords and had won safely to Britain.

I spent two weeks at sea with *St. Albans*. She had already been successfully engaged against German U-boats. She had brought down two, and probably three, of the long-range Focke Wulfs that in those days still harassed brutally the far-flung convoys of the Allies, and in those weeks I watched her crew at work in every circumstance of sea and weather.

And while I was with them the order came through that a Norwegian escort group was to be formed. An escort group is a unit of the convoy defensive mechanism. It meant that a force entirely composed of Norwegian vessels under a Norwegian senior officer, and working entirely by itself, was to be established. The compliment was a just and generous one. I looked amongst these people, who in the two short weeks had grown to be my friends, for signs of jubilation. There were none. They recognised the weight of the compliment—none better—but they said bluntly, “It is too early.” Remember this ship was credited with two submarines at least, that she had achieved success against the enemy air—perhaps the most difficult of all the destroyers’ tasks in those early days—and she had had the weight and experience of months of the great sea battle. And they said, steadily and stubbornly, that it was too early, that the Norwegian Navy was not ready for it yet ; that they preferred to work alongside British ships, under British commanding officers, and in the fullest, inmost meaning of co-operation. That in itself is one of the measures of the greatness of the little Norwegian Navy.

Those were the worst days of the Battle of the Atlantic. The sinkings were not then perhaps at the height that they were afterwards to achieve, but in those days the escort line was a desperately slender thread upon which to hang the safety of Britain’s food supply. Convoys came across the huge spaces of the Atlantic sometimes almost unescorted. Britain was reduced to strange expedients—to massing escort destroyers in areas where Intelligence and other means suggested that a heavy attack was imminent, to guessing at the next moves of the enemy and trying to forestall him, to every possible twist and manœuvre that could make one destroyer do the work of five.

The Norwegian destroyer *Bath* was sailing as part of the escort of an important convoy. They were coming through high latitudes where the weather, despite the fact that it was midsummer, was bitterly cold and the gales were incessant. In foul weather towards darkness she had just carried out an attack on a submarine with which she had made contact when she was hit by two torpedoes, and sank immediately, too far from her nearest fellow of the escort for rescue measures to be taken. In that icy sea few men survived. Commander Melsom, who had sunk and raised the submarine B. 1 after Narvik, and the majority of his ship's company went down with their ship. She was the first of the old destroyers to be sunk—the first and still the heaviest loss that the Norwegian Navy has suffered since it came to Great Britain.

III

The old destroyers achieved for themselves a stout name in those thin and bitter days along the Atlantic. They were fighting then against that other defeat that might have come to the Allies. Dunkirk and the invasion of England had passed—that period was over; England's defences were secure. The Battle of Britain had saved England from the air, the achievement of the night fighter had played its part in the breaking of the spirit of the Luftwaffe. But England was not safe. Over her hung always the spectre of starvation. There was never a day in that second year of the war when any man could have said, "England is safe." The power of the undersea attack against the British Isles can never be underrated. Though it had not reached its height then, yet it was in those months of the second year of the war that the attack of the U-boat was defeated, for that was the time of our weakest defence—and in that defence the handful of ships of the Norwegian Navy played a part out of all proportion to their slender numbers.

And Norway found time for other achievements. The Commando raids on the Norwegian coast form one of the brightest chapters in the early history of the war, in the history of the period when England, brought once to her knees, was rising to her full height again.

There were no Norwegian ships in the first and most notable attack—the great raid on the Lofoten Islands in the first days of March 1941. But officers of the Norwegian Navy, pilots from the Norwegian coast, seamen who knew the islands, the villages and fishing centres of the archipelago that faces Narvik and the Ofotfjord, took part in the adventure as guides and advisers, even as they had taken part before it started in the complex planning of the raid.

And from the Lofoten Islands came back three hundred men—Norwegian volunteers who had joined the little ships of the invasion

from the ports of Stamsund, Henningsvaer, Svolvær and Brettesnes. Safely in England nearly two hundred of these volunteered at once for service in the Norwegian Navy. The rest passed to the Army and the Air Force.

The Lofoten raid was a success. We claimed it as such in the very first announcements—but if confirmation were lacking, there was a Nazi broadcast on the night of April 14th. It began: "Spurred on by the success of the raid on the Lofoten Islands the British made another attempt of a similar kind during the night of April 12th." The German radio was wrong—as usual. The attempt on the night of April 12th—it was not an attempt but another success—was made by a Free Norwegian force from an American destroyer that had been lent to the British Navy. Every facet of alliance was represented there, but the raid was Norwegian planned, carried out by the Norwegian Navy, staffed by Norwegian men.

Oksfjord lies five degrees to the north of the Arctic Circle in the heart of the complex of fjords between Tromsø and Hammerfest. On it is one of the great fish-oil factories of northern Norway. Fish oil plays its part in war. In the glycerine which can be extracted there is an important source of the raw material for explosives. This fish-oil factory was the major target of the raid. So far was it from the coast of Britain, so deeply covered by the islands that lie off the northern coast, that the Germans thought it completely out of danger and left it entirely uncovered.

Mansfield (ex-American destroyer *Evans*) slipped in to the fjord on the night of April 11th. A landing party was ashore even as she came alongside, and within a matter of hours the fish-oil factory was completely destroyed, all the machinery wrecked, telegraph cables and other equipment of use to the German war destroyed, and through a valedictory from the Norwegians of the place *Mansfield* slipped out again and headed for the coasts of Scotland. The raiders had destroyed every one of their objectives and the raid was completely successful. The Vikings were at sea again.

Stockholm radio attributed it to the little destroyer *Sleipner*. The fame of *Sleipner* was one of the most curious things about the renaissance of the Norwegian Navy. Even while she was carrying out her valuable and admirable service of convoy escort along the British coast, she was credited with a score of exploits in and about the deep fjords of southern Norway. She became, for the people held down by the Gestapo along the coasts of Scandinavia, a symbol of renaissance. "If," said a Norwegian officer to me, "she had had the eight feet of Odin's horse, as well as the name, she could not have done half that she was credited with." Mythological or not, her strange fame helped to keep the Germans along the Norwegian coast in a state of nerves. She took no part in Oksfjord because she was not large enough, her fuel

endurance too small for the long sea passage involved in the raid, and because she was more urgently needed elsewhere.

IV

Bath was replaced by another "tin can," the *Lincoln* (ex-*Yarnall*), and the work went on. By August of 1941 the trained personnel of the Norwegian Navy had reached a new high level, and in that month the British Navy began to hand over on a lease-lend basis corvettes for Norwegian manning. In that month the Norwegian Navy took over *Eglantine*, in September *Montbretia* and *Acanthus*, in October *Rose*, and in January of the following year *Potentilla*. Who was the misguided humorist who chose three of the most unpronounceable of flower names to hand over to Norwegian-speaking crews, I do not know. The Norwegian Navy has a special place for him in its heart—it is not a good place!

Long before *Eglantine* came into service the Norwegian Navy had won its spurs in the Battle of the Atlantic. These ships were to add to its reputation not only in that main battle but in the convoys for the African landing and even on the shores of Norway itself.

On the first day of 1942 the British Admiralty issued a communiqué which said, "Light forces under the command of Rear-Admiral L. H. K. Hamilton, D.S.O., returned to-day from combined operations lasting several days in the Lofoten Islands, off the north coast of Norway." H.M.S. *Arethusa* was the heavy ship in this impertinent operation. With a force of destroyers and corvettes (which included *Acanthus* and *Eglantine* and three converted fishing vessels of the Royal Norwegian Navy, as well as Polish ships whose exploits have already been described) Admiral Hamilton steamed into the Vestfjord, piloted by Norwegian officers who knew every rock and skerry of that complex coast.

At six o'clock in the morning of Boxing Day Reine on Moskeneskyo was reached. Moskenes town was taken a little later and the German wireless station at Glaapen. For the 26th, 27th and 28th the force was in the Vestfjord. On the 27th it was attacked by a German aeroplane which dropped a bomb close to *Arethusa* without damaging her. Otherwise it was left alone.

Once again the beard of the German Navy was singed.

The full anti-submarine record of the corvettes may not be given even now. The ban against details of U-boat sinkings still holds, but in that first year of their work (during which for a long time they were associated with the American Task Force which shared the difficulties and dangers of the Battle of the Atlantic in the approaches to Britain) they achieved "golden opinions." Commander W. A. S.

Macklin, U.S.N., wrote to the Commanding Officer of his Task Force on returning to America :

I should like to say a word for my Norwegians. They are perfectly splendid, and are in there fighting all the time. They are full of initiative, excellent at signals, have been of great assistance in radio-communication, and they are very able mind-readers. As soon as they know what you want they give it to you without asking. Fortunately for me they understood everything I tried to put over at my first conference, and my path has been extremely easy as a consequence. Grønningsaether takes excellent care of his group.

There was a brief footnote : "The commander Task Force Blank takes pleasure in transmitting these remarks to the commanding officers of the Norwegian Corvettes, and adds his own approval."

They reached the height of their fame in the tremendous attacks of the last six months of 1942 when, for months on end, the Allies lived dangerously close to the peak of submarine sinkings, when the threat to the life-line of Britain never ceased by day or by night, the months when the Allies seemed to be losing the race between new building and sinking, when the possibility of the cutting of the main artery of war-time Britain had to be faced.

Take the story of three of them—*Potentilla*, *Montbretia* and *Eglantine*. Operating with those great names of the Battle of the Atlantic—*Fame* of "The Fighting Eighth" and *Viscount* of the great-hearted "V"s and "W"s—they took a highly successful part in August of 1942 in the defeat of one of the most vicious attacks by a wolf-pack in the centre of the Atlantic. *Potentilla* that day saw a ship in the distance torpedoed and, going to her rescue, picked up seventeen Norwegian survivors, for she was one of Norway's Merchant Navy. In October, in another of the heavy wolf-pack raids, still working in the same group of famous ships, she heavily damaged one submarine and in the course of a long-drawn-out action, picked up ninety-two survivors from torpedoed ships.

In November they were again in the news, but this time there was a price to pay for admiralty. On the first evening of that attack at five o'clock *Montbretia* was hit and sank swiftly. *Potentilla*, coming in to the rescue, picked up twenty-seven of her people. Her captain and forty-six men went down with her. The battle was grim and there was no ceasing.

In December there was a four-day battle for a convoy bound for Britain.

The story of that attack is great even among the tremendous episodes of the Battle of the Atlantic. The first U-boat to be seen broke surface ahead of H.M.S. *Viscount*. In the split second after her sighting Lt.-Cmdr. John Waterhouse, R.N., commanding officer of *Viscount*, attempted to ram. He could not turn the ship swiftly enough, and

the U-boat just cleared his bows. A very heavy sea was running, the gunners were blinded by the spray that was hurled continually over the ship, but they opened fire and it is possible that one hit was scored. A second attempt to ram was foiled by the heavy sea in which the destroyer yawed many degrees from her course as she attempted to straighten up for the attack, and the U-boat had time to dive. Immediately after *Viscount* attacked with depth charges, and an enormous patch of oil spread over the water.

For three days and nights after that U-boats were seen incessantly. Two at least were damaged by *Fame* and *Acanthus* during this period; and on the fourth day, in the darkness just before the dawn, *Viscount* sighted yet another. She closed at full speed, and although the enemy, putting on its utmost speed, attempted to escape on the surface, *Viscount* came in to the kill so swiftly that she rammed the U-boat just abaft the conning tower and held it pinned for fifteen seconds before she fetched clear with its back broken. As the wreck drifted astern it received hits from every gun that could be brought to bear, and sank within a few minutes.

On the following day *Fame*, carrying out a depth-charge attack on a submerged U-boat, saw a vast bubble of air break up through the sea, and in the centre of it a U-boat broke surface steeply. She opened fire while closing at her utmost speed, rammed the U-boat on the surface and, as she broke clear, dropped depth charges. The convoy, steaming by, opened fire at the same time, and the enemy crew abandoned ship. Half her crew was rescued by *Fame*, and *Acanthus* picked up another twenty. Thereafter the convoy was left alone.

Previously in October *Acanthus* herself had been credited with two "good attacks."

Meanwhile *Rose*, operating with the convoys for the North African landings, carried out seventeen attacks in November of 1942. Two submarines were known to be heavily damaged in the course of these attacks. In December of the same year, still working on the southern run, she was credited with "several good attacks."

On the 10th January, 1943, a joint statement of the British Admiralty and the Air Ministry described one of the greatest of all the many battles in what should properly be called the campaign of the Atlantic. That communiqué, which has been called "epic," says:

First Day: Two or three U-boats attempted to close the convoy at about midnight. Visibility was good and the enemy was hotly engaged by the escort.

The Norwegian corvette *Eglantine* scored a direct hit by gunfire on one of the U-boats. The submarine at once submerged, either sinking or seriously damaged, and was then attacked by depth charges.

Other U-boats which attempted to take part in this attack were driven off without loss to the convoy.

Later that night U-boats resumed the attack and a torpedo hit

started a fire in one of the merchant ships in convoy. By the glare of the flames the *Eglantine* sighted a U-boat ahead and engaged it with gunfire, scoring several hits in quick succession.

During this action the *Eglantine's* crew sighted a second submarine surfacing at close range to starboard. While still engaging the first U-boat, the *Eglantine* opened fire on the second submarine with every gun which could be brought to bear and forced the enemy to dive.

Meanwhile H.M. destroyer *Fame*, commanded by Commander R. Heathcote, R.N., whose award of the D.S.O. was announced last week, and the Norwegian corvette *Rose* sighted and engaged two further U-boats. One of these crash-dived and was attacked with depth charges. The other was driven off.

Soon afterwards the U-boats resumed the attack. From then onwards, with hardly a pause throughout the night, they made repeated and unsuccessful attempts to close the convoy. Each time they were driven off.

Second Day : With daylight, Liberator aircraft of Coastal Command took up patrol around the convoy. A U-boat was sighted by Squadron-Leader Bulloch and attacked with depth charges, which straddled the conning tower.

The U-boat was almost certainly destroyed, as a patch of oil, nearly 800 yards long and dotted with debris, floated to the surface soon afterwards.

At intervals during the following nine hours aircraft of Coastal Command made 10 more attacks on U-boats. This deterred them from working into position ahead of the convoy.

During the afternoon two U-boats were detected and attacked by our surface escorts. Following one of these attacks, made by the Norwegian corvette *Potentilla*, large pools of oil floated to the surface.

Third Day : Deteriorating weather during the following day brought a short lull in the battle. With nightfall the U-boats again made determined attempts to pierce the convoy's protective screen.

Towards midnight the Polish destroyer *Burza* sighted a U-boat on the surface and attempting to close the convoy. Then started what the destroyer's commanding officer described as an "exhilarating chase."

The U-boat zig-zagged in a vain attempt to escape, and, as the range closed, she crash-dived—a manœuvre which was assisted by depth charges from the *Burza*.

Several minutes after the last depth charges had exploded a further heavy underwater explosion was heard.

Fourth Day : During the early hours of the following morning more attempts by U-boats to close the convoy were beaten back by the *Rose*, the *Potentilla* and H.M. corvette *Vervain* (Lieutenant H. P. Crail, R.N.R.).

With daylight planes of the R.A.F. and United States naval aircraft resumed patrol. In three and a half hours they made six attacks against U-boats. All the submarines were forced to submerge, and one was probably sunk, as debris and two bodies were subsequently sighted.

Later the attacks became less frequent and all were driven off without further damage to the convoy.

Ultimately the U-boats abandoned the chase altogether. The last 36 hours of the convoy's passage to home waters passed without incident.

V

The little submarine section of the Norwegian Navy was working too, all this time. B. I., so gallantly recovered from the Narvik fjord, was too small and too old to be of use operationally in this war, and her work was confined to training off the British coast.

To replace her the Norwegians received from the British a modern submarine which they named *Uredd* (Fearless). She worked, by the special request of the Norwegian Government, along the coast of Norway, and to her credit was a considerable list of successes against German transports and the coastwise traffic. On one occasion two German transports were sunk in a single brief action. But on March 25th there appeared the brief note that has covered so many heroic endings: "The Norwegian submarine *Uredd* is overdue and must be presumed lost."

Already she is replaced.

VI

The time came when the flow of new shipping from the British yards made it possible to turn over modern "Hunt" class destroyers to the Norwegian Navy. Two of these were available in the mid-summer of 1942—*Eskdale* and *Glaisdale*, "Hunt" class destroyers of just over 1,000 tons, small, handy little ships with admirable guns and every possible development of war-time equipment. They were appointed early to the English Channel. *Eskdale* was commanded by Commander Storheill who had had *St. Albans*.

The destroyers of the Channel escort force serve a double rôle. Along the south coast from the Thames to Land's End and beyond they cover the coastwise convoys—that vital stream of small ships and big whose continued flow within at one point seventeen miles of the enemy coast has been one of the major naval miracles of the war. And in their spare time the Channel "Hunts"—hunt. From a defensive force they become swiftly, ingeniously, shrewdly offensive, raiding over to Gris Nez, to Boulogne Roads, off Dieppe town, along the Cherbourg peninsula.

The Norwegians take their share in both these duties. There is not much that can be said about the escort runs. They were efficiently performed. The conduct of the destroyers earned the highest praise from the men of the British destroyers with whom they worked—and no more need be said than that.

The "huntings" on the opposite coast are more spectacular. Perhaps the most important of these in which the Norwegian ships took part was the attack on an enemy convoy off Cap de la Hague on the 14th October, 1942. "Convoy" is possibly not the precise word—

the target was a single enemy ship, but she was literally ringed by an escort of heavy torpedo-boats (600-ton ships) and minesweepers. She was thought to be a U-boat supply ship bound for the west and south with fuel, stores and—most important—torpedoes for U-boats operating in the distant Atlantic. It was clear from the strength of her escort that she was of very great importance.

The enemy was located on the evening of Tuesday, 13th October, by naval aircraft of Coastal Command. The convoy was intercepted off Cap de la Hague, the supply ship was severely damaged by gunfire, and two of the escort ships were set on fire. The action was brief, brisk, and highly successful. Shortly after the enemy escort force had been scattered the damaged ship was attacked by a motor torpedo-boat, was hit by two torpedoes and blew up with a tremendous explosion. Throughout the action enemy shore guns were firing on *Eskdale* and her sister ships, but without effect.

In December there was another successful action. An enemy convoy of considerable importance was believed to be moving down the coast, and for four nights in succession the destroyers hunted the area without making contact. On the fifth night five "Hunts"—*Eskdale* and *Glaisdale* among them—were working the French coast off Dieppe when they sighted the leading ships of the convoy's escort.

In a vigorous and continuous action two of our ships were hit, damaged, and compelled to break off the fight; but *Eskdale*, thrusting into and through the enemy's line, sank a torpedo-boat of 600 tons, smashed and sank two R-boats and damaged other craft. The merchant ships of the convoy were attacked by other units of the force, and from *Eskdale* they saw two of them sunk. With superficial damage and a handful of casualties, *Eskdale* came safely home.

But she lasted nine months only in that dangerous trade. In April of 1943 she was covering a westbound convoy between Portsmouth and Land's End. E-boats were reported to be at sea. The convoy was proceeding slowly off Plymouth when the first news was received, and *Eskdale* fell back astern of it, increased speed and zig-zagged in wide sweeps, endeavouring to cover possible approach from astern.

A little later fresh information was received, and she increased speed again, widening the width of her sweeps across the route of the convoy. It was clear that an attack was to be made, and when it became apparent that E-boats were coming in *Eskdale* commenced firing star-shell. She was turning as she fired the first group of shells and the brilliant flames dropping towards the sea were spread across a wide area. But despite their brilliance she was unable to see in the darkness the E-boat which delivered the first attack, and she was hit under the fore part of the ship by one torpedo. The bows of the ship were completely cut off. The bow-chaser pom-pom was

flung, mounting and all, over the bridge of the ship, over the funnel, to crash down on the midship multiple pom-pom and, after wrecking it, to crash off into the motor-boat and smash that also.

Almost immediately afterwards a second torpedo hit the stern under the depth-charge magazine. Miraculously the depth charges failed to detonate, but the whole stern of the ship was blown away, and depth charges were blown through the deck, smashed the after guns and killed a number of men.

Lieutenant Andresen, her First Lieutenant, who had been on Number One gun—which was blown up almost to the level of the bridge by the force of the explosion—managed to get aft and survey the damage, and, going up to the still relatively undamaged bridge, reported to Commander Storheill that the centre section of the ship was still floating and the bulkheads holding. Commander Storheill determined not to abandon ship, in the hope that the centre section would hold until morning and stand a chance of being towed to port.

A number of men had been blown over the side by the force of the explosion, and efforts were being made to rescue them when fire broke out in the after part of the ship in what had been the clothing store. No pumps were working and it was impossible to get the fire hoses going, but with extinguishers they fought the blaze and finally put it out.

Ahead of the wreck the convoy had carried on, and about this time they heard on *Eskdale* a heavy explosion in the direction in which it had disappeared. One merchant ship was torpedoed and sunk.

A little after one of the British M.L.s of the escort came back to their assistance, and as she drew close a further attack was made on the hulk that had been *Eskdale*. The first torpedo of this attack passed close under the wreck of the bows without hitting. The second was coming directly for the floating section—and as it approached it began to porpoise, leaping clear of the water and diving deep, coming up again and flashing white on the dark surface of the night sea. In its mad course it raced right up to *Eskdale's* side, made one terrific leap as it neared the ship, and dived clear under her. Coming up again on the starboard quarter of the hulk it hit floating wreckage almost alongside the ship, and exploded.

The first torpedoes had hit at one o'clock. At two o'clock Commander Storheill decided to get his crew to such safety as was possible, and stand by the wreck through the night on the M.L. to board her again in the morning if she still floated. There was no point in remaining on the wreck, which must obviously be a potential target for further attacks, as there was not a gun left on her with which to fight. The whaler—the only boat surviving—was lowered, and the rafts and Carley floats dropped into the water. The majority of the crew went over the side to these, while the wounded and the remainder of the

ship's company, with Commander Storheill, were taken off by the M.L. which, brilliantly handled, was brought right alongside the hulk.

As they lay off the wreck waiting hopefully for dawn, fire broke out again. Clearly it had been smouldering throughout this time and now, fanned by the wind, had suddenly become vicious. Commander Storheill ordered his First Lieutenant to get a party of volunteers and go back to fight the fire. The difficulty was not to obtain volunteers—but to select them.

As the M.L. approached the ship to put the party on board, the E-boats made their third attack. The M.L. was within less than a hundred feet of the burning centre section of the ship when a torpedo hit her in the magazine and she disintegrated in their faces. Immediately afterwards the E-boats commenced an attack on the appallingly overcrowded M.L. From her, leaving a number of wounded behind, it carried the attack to the whaler in the water. The officer in the whaler told his men to get over the side and keep under water during the attack, and so suffered practically no casualties.

Almost the most astonishing thing about the whole night is that, after three attacks, after at least six torpedoes had been fired, after the attacks on the M.L. and the whaler and the men on the rafts, only fifteen men were killed and ten missing of the whole ship's company.

But *Eskdale* was gone—half the strength of the Norwegian Navy in modern destroyers.

CHAPTER IV

I

IN 1939—actually before the outbreak of the war—the Norwegian Government had ordered from the yards of Messrs. Vosper Ltd. and the British Power Boat Co. eight motor torpedo-boats as a part of the programme for the strengthening of the Norwegian Navy. There was inevitably delay in the production of these craft at the outbreak of the war, but they were nearing completion when the blow fell on Norway, and in May of 1940 two of them were taken over by Norwegian officers and ratings. The remaining six were requisitioned by the British authorities to strengthen the weak coastwise screen of Britain.

The two boats manned by the Norwegians were posted as a Norwegian sub-division under the Commanding Officer M.T.B. Flotillas, at a South Coast port. After four and a half months of hard and sometimes brilliant work in the Channel—four and a half months that covered the fall of the Calais coast, the Dunkirk operation and the whole of the German invasion preparations—one of the M.T.B.s was

so badly damaged off the coast of France by the heavy seas of a Channel gale on the night of September 25th that she broke open, was flooded and had to be abandoned. Six months later the other was lost by an accidental explosion in harbour.

II

By this time the Norwegians were manning motor launches as well. These M.L.s worked with their own "Hunts" and British ships on the endless tasks of the Channel convoy escort.

Watching these little ships in a head gale in the Channel, pounding from crest to crest, standing alternately on their sharp bows and their square sterns, I know something of the devotion, the courage and the energy of the people who man them. To a tremendous degree this has been a little ship war, and these are almost the smallest of the little ships that have taken their part in it. That part has been a notable one.

III

The two lost M.T.B.s were replaced by six others which were transferred under the naval agreement between the two Governments, and these in turn were replaced by nine boats of a newer and larger type. These nine boats made a Flotilla, entirely manned and operated by Norwegians.

For a considerable time this flotilla co-operated with British flotillas in the Channel. As early as September of 1941 an Admiralty communiqué stated :

A convoy of two supply ships with a strong escort was intercepted. In the first attack, just before midnight, one of the supply ships, of about 3,500 tons, was hit by torpedo. This ship was certainly badly damaged, and probably sunk.

While the convoy was being shadowed after the first attack an engagement took place between our ships and the convoy escort. In this one E-boat was probably sunk and an armed trawler was set on fire.

Shortly afterwards a second attack was made on the enemy convoy. In this the remaining supply ship, of about 4,000 tons, was torpedoed. This caused a very big explosion and much wreckage was thrown into the air.

The only casualties suffered by our ships were four wounded. One of the vessels which sank the 4,000-ton supply ship was a motor torpedo-boat manned by the Royal Norwegian Navy.

The communiqué is terse, with the traditional baldness of British naval communiqués. It says nothing of the roaring approach over the Channel, the final creeping up to the heavily escorted convoy, the

dash in at the last moment. It says nothing of the wild flight of tracer bullets that must have criss-crossed sky and sea ; the enormous upsurge of the bow waves as the ships went into the attack at full speed ; the staccato stutter of the light guns, the reply of the heavy guns of the escort—the welter of sound and fury and confusion.

On the German-occupied coast of France traffic has moved in “penny numbers”—ships travelling with an escort of six to eight E- and R-boats ; two ships moving with everything from “Maas” class destroyers to hordes of trawlers and E-boats. That stands in contrast to the easy convoys that use our Channel. And to that the Germans have been driven by the fury of these little ships.

After a period in the Channel in which, as with the other units of the Norwegian Navy, they achieved a solid reputation for efficiency and for fighting qualities, the Norwegian M.T.B. flotilla left. Where they went to, where they are posted now, may not be said. It is one of the secrets of the war that the Germans would like to know. Of what they are doing now little can be said. Something of it may be gathered from a message sent in January of 1943 to the Norwegian Naval Headquarters in London : “Please convey to the officers and men and the maintenance staff of the——M.T.B. Flotilla (Norwegian) Their Lordships congratulations on the recent series of operations carried out in the Norwegian fjords.” Such signals are not lightly won.

Even as far back as that January the Admiralty was speaking of “a series of operations.” There have been many more. Throughout 1943 the flotilla was constantly in operation. To the Norwegians, with their national existence dependent as it is upon the sea, with their young men living for the most part in coast towns and villages, with an enormous proportion of their people trained from earliest childhood in the use of small boats and in the tortuous navigation of the fjords, the work of the M.T.B.s has almost the qualities of a sport. The salt is in the veins of Norway’s youth, the fighting of small boats is in their nature, the tradition of two thousand years stands by their shoulders. The Norwegian flotilla goes to the fjords of Norway in the tradition of the long ships.

IV

Eskdale had been lost but she was replaced. The British Admiralty, recognising the magnificent qualities of the destroyer men of the Norwegian Navy, gave to them a new heavy fleet destroyer of the “S” class. She was christened *Stord*, and in her the Norwegian Navy took part for the first time in a major action.

On December 26th, 1943, the German battle-cruiser *Scharnhorst* attempted to attack a Murmansk convoy which was moving between the south edge of the ice-pack and the North Cape. Magnificently

fought off by the cruisers of the convoy escort, *Scharnhorst* fell back, and was caught by the *Duke of York*, supported by the cruiser *Jamaica* with a screen of four destroyers. Those destroyers were H.M.S. *Savage*, H.M.S. *Saumarez*, H.M.S. *Scorpion* and His Norwegian Majesty's Ship *Stord*. *Stord* was commanded by Lieutenant-Commander Storheill (it is interesting to note that Commander Storheill had voluntarily dropped a step in rank in order to take his place in a British flotilla).

In one of the most breathless destroyer actions of the war the four closed on the flying giant. Unsupported, they drew in until the range was almost suicidal. There was a heavy sea running, and the destroyers were swept continuously. *Stord* lost a man washed overboard from her torpedo tubes; but, with a magnificent defiance both of the sea and of the enemy, Commander Storheill closed to within 400 yards of the *Scharnhorst* before he loosed his torpedoes. The attack crippled the *Scharnhorst*. She lost speed and almost stopped, and the *Duke of York* pounded her to pieces. At 7.45 p.m. she sank, sixty miles north-east of the North Cape.

Well may the Germans say in the words of the ancient English prayer: "*A furore Normannorum libera nos*" . . . "From the anger of the Norsemen, good Lord, deliver us."

HOLLAND

CHAPTER I

I

ROARING through the night at full speed, her sharp, angular bows flinging up enormous plumes that even in the darkness were brilliant, an M.T.B. raced through a gap in the screen of a German convoy almost under the white cliffs of Gris Nez. About her the night became alive with gun flashes and the red and orange sparks of tracer bullets. Their meteoric anger lit up the bow wave; the song of their passing came clear even above the roar of the engines and the crash and hurtle of the spray. She passed through the gap, squared on her target, fired her torpedoes, and turned away. As she completed the turn, her own guns firing at the escort, the night livid with streak on counter streak of flame, her crew heard astern of them the crash as one of the torpedoes hit. That M.T.B. was Dutch, officered by a Dutch Lieutenant, manned by Dutchmen operating out of a British port.

Four hundred years ago Spain fell upon the provinces of the Netherlands like sea through a broken dyke. The march of the Duke of Alva was as brilliant, as methodical and as harsh as the march of von Keitel's army. The army of William of Orange was broken, his eldest son and heir was kidnapped and carried off to Spain—even as the army of Wilhelmina of Orange was broken in 1940, even as Hitler's men attempted to kidnap the person of the Queen herself. There was left nothing of freedom in all the Netherlands; there was left nothing of Holland save that upon the sea there was a little fleet—a fleet that had fallen back from the low coast ports of Holland to the east and to the south coasts of England, a fleet of privateers, small ships that alone were left to carry the flag of Orange and the lion of Brabant. Under William de la Marck, Lord of Lumey, and a dozen other leaders they brought the dying spark of battle back to an angry flame. In a score of raids on the lowland sea, in running fights from the Elbe mouth to the coast of Cherbourg and beyond, in all the desperate courage of desperate men, they told Alva and the men of Spain that the Netherlands were still alive. They earned—and they carried with the proudness of a title of chivalry—the name "*Les Gueux de Mer*," the Beggars of the Sea.

Hardly does one need to draw the parallel. Holland was overrun in May of 1940. That very great lady Queen Wilhelmina came to Britain in a British destroyer. With her came the remnants of her Navy, her Merchant Navy and her fishing fleet. Out of them has

been made a new *Gueyx de Mer*. This is the story of the making of that Navy and of its accomplishments—so much, that is, as can be told whilst still the Beggars of the Sea tell Germany that Holland is alive.

II

The Dutch Navy at the outbreak of war was small, but it had a very considerable proportion of modern ships. It was on the verge of significant expansion. The rising temperature of the Far East had led the Dutch Admiralty, and finally the Dutch Government, into plans for a substantial increase both in personnel and in ships. Broadly speaking, the new navy was planned not for war in Europe but on the coasts of the rich island Empire of the Netherlands in the East.

In Europe Holland had a tradition of neutrality. For a hundred years she had known peace. Even through the Great War of 1914-18 she maintained a rigorous neutrality. Except for the brief skirmishes inherent in colonial empires, her Navy had known nothing of war. There was, far back in history, a great tradition—the names of Tromp and de Ruyter, the names of half a hundred battles, stand high in the roll of fame—but there had been a gap in that tradition, a long gap. Holland had lost belief in the necessity of war. The Peace Conferences of the Hague were in considerable part an expression of that disbelief. She could conceive of war only in the Far East; and the naval expansion which was determined, and which was beginning to be implemented when Germany invaded her frontiers, was only an expression of that conception.

The Navy consisted of five cruisers—*Jacob van Heemskerck*, *Java*, *De Ruyter*, *Sumatra* and *Tromp*. There were eight destroyers—*Banckert*, *Evertsen*, *Jan van Galen*, *Van Ghent*, *Piet Hein*, *Kortenaer*, *Van Nes* and *Witte de With*—six torpedo-boats, several M.T.B.s, twenty-four submarines, sixteen minesweepers, and some fourteen auxiliary craft of one type and another. It was planned to add to these under the building programme of May, 1940, three battleships of 27,000 tons, two 8,000-ton cruisers, one light cruiser, four destroyers, nineteen M.T.B.s, seven submarines, six escort vessels, seven gun-boats, six minesweepers and a force of flying-boats. This was an important programme. Had it been completed in time, the history of the war in the Far East might have been very different. It was not completed.

In May of 1940 the greater portion of the Navy as it then existed was at Surabaya and Batavia and the various naval ports of the East Indian Islands. Of a total complement of 11,750 officers and men in the Service only about 3,000 were in the Netherlands and European

waters. Only one cruiser was in Home Waters at the time of the invasion ; otherwise there were no ships bigger than destroyers.

Since Germany attacked from the land frontiers, there was little that the Navy could do to stem the assault. Not until the parachute troops landed in the ports and the enemy tried to cross the great dyke of the Zuider Zee did the guns of the Navy play their full part. It is one of the bitterest ironies of this new type of war that Holland's Navy came into action for the first time after a hundred years of peace in the very heart of its greatest port.

III

It is curious, in view of the massing of German troops and the enormous land preparations, that the first act of hostility against Holland should have been on the sea.

Shortly after midnight of Thursday, May 9th, coastguards reported considerable air activity over the coastwise channels with intermittent heavy explosions. This pointed undoubtedly to the laying of magnetic mines. Three hours later, in the early morning of Friday, May 10th, the air activity against the land began. At 3.15 a.m. the aerodromes of Schiphol, Waalhaven, Bergen and De Kooy were bombed. Germany was at war with Holland. Unprovoked, treacherous, brutal, her great attack was launched with all the odious insincerities of German policy.

Holland's military power was considerable, but it was insufficient to cover the whole long eastern frontier against the enormous weight of a German armoured onslaught. The terrain, because of the lack of natural obstacles, does not permit of the formation of any defensive line from the Ems to Aix-la-Chapelle. It had been decided, therefore, to organise a defensive in three stages, sacrificing the northern provinces to the harsh necessity of war. The first line, that of the Yssel, ran from the eastern end of the Zuider Zee along the River Yssel. It was intended as a delaying line only, as a protection against strategic surprise. Its troops were to fall back on the main forces which held the Grebbe line, the second and principal line of defence. This line ran from the southern end of the Zuider Zee to the Rhine (here called the Waal) and then in a southerly direction to the Belgian frontier, where it linked up with the line of the Albert Canal. If this line were broken (and though shorter than the other, it was still very long), there remained a third barrier—the barrier that lay between the Zuider Zee and the great arm of the Hollandsche Diep, the estuary of the Rhine. This was the line that with its inundations, with the Zuider Zee, with the estuary, was to make an island—and an island fortress—of the province of Holland itself.

This is not the place to discuss the military campaign. In swift

and whirlwind moves, while the Dutch Army fought with a gallantry that excited the admiration of the world, Germany drove through the outer defences. Treachery and surprise breached the fortress. The Moerdijk bridge (communicating across the estuary of the Rhine) was captured by enemy troops in Dutch uniforms before it could be destroyed. Enormous numbers of parachute troops were dropped inside the fortress island. The Queen herself was in danger. And the Dutch strategy, which had depended on the reinforcements of the First Army Corps (which had been intended to man the Holland line when the Grebbe line was breached) broke down, for the First Army Corps had to be split into fragments to deal with parachutists at Rotterdam, at the Hague, at Delft and a dozen other places. Meanwhile Germany was attacking in the north as well, and had captured the eastern end of the new dyke across the mouth of the Zuider Zee.

In the terrible confusion of disaster, with the whole strategic plan in fragments almost in the hour of its inception, with the enemy everywhere—not merely in the outer line of the encirclements, but in the inner defences—the Navy came in to play its part.

There have been few engagements in this war so fantastic as the fight of the gunboat *Fryer*. It began at Arnhem. Arnhem is in Gelderland, almost on the German frontier, the very heart of inland Holland—yet here, on the Lek, a branch of the River Rhine, she opened fire in support of the left flank of the Dutch troops as they fell back before the mad weight of Germany. From Arnhem to Rhenen she fought magnificently. The Grebbe line went, and she fell back by Wijk and Kuilenburg to Vreeswijk. She kept on fighting until she had to be sunk by her own crew after Holland had capitulated.

Meanwhile the first German attempt to take the Hague and the person of the Queen was broken under the determination of the Dutch police and the local garrisons. Late in the afternoon the Germans made a tremendous effort to reinforce the parachute battalions. Transport 'planes came down on the beach south of Katwijk at low tide. The destroyer *van Galen*, racing up to Rotterdam to help, coincided with the landings, and her shell-fire destroyed 'plane after 'plane. This second attempt was broken.

But simultaneously with the attack on the Hague the Germans had occupied the Waalhaven aerodrome. The bombing in the small hours had disorganised the defences; a swift parachute attack occupied it; and that attack was followed by brilliantly organised troop-carrier landings. Waalhaven is the great commercial harbour of Rotterdam. It lies to the south-west of the city on the Nieuwe Maas. The aerodrome is to the east of it. Fanning out from the flying-ground the German troops occupied Waalhaven itself and the south bank of the Maas, and began to infiltrate into the city to attack the river crossings in conjunction with other parachute troops dropped near

them and with troops landed from amphibian planes on the Maas itself.

Into that struggle raced, impetuous, the torpedo-boat H.M.Z.5 and the torpedo motor boat 51. With the help of marines from the Rotterdam establishment and covered by fire from the little ships, the bridges were recaptured and held for a while.

It was obvious, however, that heavier metal was needed against the reinforcements that were pouring in from the Waalhaven aerodrome. The *van Galen* was at Den Helder at the north tip of Holland, holding a watching brief against a German sea attack. She came racing down, and on the way played her part at the battle of the Hague. From there she turned up the Nieuwe Waterweg, already made intolerably treacherous with magnetic mines, and, somehow threading her way through the unseen dangers, reached the port. There on the narrow water she came into action again—an action that played an important part in stemming the first rush of the Germans.

Her guns shelled the aerodrome and the concentrations of troops, and inflicted heavy casualties. But she herself was like a rat in a trap—a trap made of narrow channels, of harbour basins, of small connecting canals. She had no room in which to manœuvre, no place in which to work up to full speed against the threat of bombs or artillery fire. She moved violently from place to place—and always the bombs sought her out. Thirty-one dive-bombing attacks were made on her. Again and again she dodged bombs that fell with shattering violence in the shallow water beside her. All the while she continued to work her guns until at last in the Merwede Haven she received a direct hit and had to be abandoned in a sinking condition.

Her crew went ashore and made of themselves an army, they fought valiantly against the weight of the German forces on the south bank. But the Nieuwe Waterweg had become too dangerous, and the commander of the *van Galen* reported that it was impossible for the *Johan Maurits van Nassau*, a gunboat which had been ordered to join him, to operate there. The same considerations applied to the British destroyers which were coming in to help.

Meanwhile from the north the German attack was swinging in. At Delfzijl the Dutch forces had demolished the harbour, blocked the locks, and retired towards the Zuiderzeedyke. In the late afternoon of May 10th they made contact with the forces which had fought a delaying action in Groningen and Friesland, crossed the dyke in the night of May 10th, and took up a defensive position near Den Helder. On the following day the Germans attacked the eastern bridge-head of the dyke. The German Air Force, free of opposition, attacked the fortifications of the dyke, and under their cover the Germans broke through and seized the dyke as far as Kornwerderzand.

Meanwhile the *Johan Maurits van Nassau* had raced round from the

Hook of Holland. She anchored herself in the open water of the Wadden Zee and began an astonishing bombardment of the Germans. In the course of this she silenced the German battery on the eastern bridge-head from a distance of eighteen kilometres. The ranging was done from the fortified position on Kornwerderzand, whence it was telephoned to Den Helder whence it was passed by wireless to the *Nassau*. Despite that complicated connection the fire was brilliant, and owing to the thickness of the weather the Germans never discovered the gunboat.

Unable to break across the dyke against this gallant holding, the Germans captured the eastern coastline of the Zuider Zee, seized all the small craft they could, brought others overland, and planned an invasion across the water. There were no troops available to man the western coast of the Zuider Zee.

To meet this new and critical situation the Navy was flung in again. One torpedo-boat, three gunboats and two minesweepers came in to reinforce the old river gunboat that was the "heavy metal" of the tiny motor-boat force established there. On the urgent request of the Dutch Admiralty they were reinforced by British motor torpedo-boats, which came in by the North Sea canal through Amsterdam. This reinforcement reached there on the night of May 12th.

Before they came the tiny Dutch flotillas had rushed the harbour of Stavoren, damaged the invasion forces there, and attacked a dozen other points along the coast. They had no air protection and they suffered heavily. The gunboats H.M. *Friso* and H.M. *Brimio* were sunk. They died fighting.

Meanwhile along the main coasts where the Germans were still attempting to use the beaches as landing grounds, patrols of torpedo-boats and gunboats kept the enemy desperately at bay.

But all their work was vain. The speed of the German attack, the ruthless genius with which the parachute troops were used, the combination of treachery from without and from within, breached the fortress Holland. From the south the German force, striking up, broke resistance. The possible line of retirement of the Holland garrison was lost. It became obvious that, except for the islands to the south, resistance would have to be abandoned.

It was early apparent that a major portion of the German plan was the capture of the person of the Queen and of the Dutch Government itself. It became urgently necessary, with the parachutists floating down through the Spring skies, for the Queen to move to a safer area. The people of the British destroyer which took Her Majesty from Holland speak still of the unhurried dignity of that very great lady. The first plan was that she should move towards the south, but even as the departure began the new area was attacked. The destroyer headed out for the coast of England. In the evening

of the same day another ship brought the Dutch Government to Britain. And in the same hours began the movement of the Navy—such of its units, that is, as could take no part in the fighting.

IV

That was an astonishing evacuation. The Germans had attempted to block every port in Holland with magnetic mines—Flushing, the Waterweg, Ymuiden. Two ships leaving Rotterdam, one of them a British vessel carrying refugees, blew up and dangerously obstructed the channel. The desperate work of British magnetic minesweepers could not clear the ports in time. At Ymuiden the S.S. *van Renselaer* struck a magnetic mine just outside the locks, while the minesweeper M III was blown up on the other side. Warships building and awaiting completion in Rotterdam were blocked in the port, and when the decision to surrender Holland was made, they were blown up.

On the evening of the 13th, however, two new submarines O 23 and O 24, sufficiently complete to face the open sea, slipped out through the mass of the magnetic mines and got away. One of them had made a couple of trial runs but had never dived. The Germans were already in Rotterdam, and there were only fifteen men aboard the submarine, including a harbour official. The position was desperate, and her commander decided to make the attempt. As she edged away from the quay a number of her crew arrived and made flying leaps on to the deck.

They got out through the Nieuwe Waterweg and the outside channels and reached the open sea, and as they did so German 'planes came swooping out of the cloud to the attack. She had no deck armament to withstand them; her only hope of safety was in diving. She had never dived before, and she had barely enough crew to man the controls. Her commander, however, had no alternative. He gave the order to dive believing that he was signing his own death-warrant. She dived and escaped.

For hours she lay on the sea bottom. Lying there, the commander made the rounds of his ship. Heavy condensation had set in, and he found the dockyard official sitting placidly with an umbrella over his head. At one time it seemed doubtful if they would be able to surface again, but they got her up and found bombers once more over their heads. This time they were British, and, thrusting across the shallows of the North Sea, they got safely to an English port.

A gunboat lying in the Scheldt in Zeeland had just completed three years' duty in the Netherlands East Indies. Her crew were on leave, but they came back to play their part, and in the end she too was ordered to make her escape. The channel itself was full of magnetic mines, and she was not degaussed. There was a desperate

chance if she steamed through the shallows at high tide, close to the banks. Along these shallows there were wooden groins made of stout piling. Her commander took her through and over these. Even to-day, after two years of working about the British coast, her bottom shows the scars of that mad, hairbreadth race to safety.

They saved, too, the College of Den Helder, not the equipment, not even many of the staff, but the one vital thing that is a naval college—the cadets. Already these boys in their 'teens had established a fighting record. Three of them had taken ammunition supplies across the shell-swept Zuiderzeedyke to beleaguered Kornwerderzand; fifteen of them had helped to bring nine hundred parachutist prisoners across to England; four of them, with a lieutenant in charge, brought across the almost sacred Vaandel, the standard of the Corps—the only standard that was to escape from all Holland in that terrible time.

Seventy-nine of them reached England safely, and with these the instructors who had escaped set up their College of Den Helder in the West Country. They began it with blackboards that had been used for deck games in the lounge of a Dutch passenger vessel lying in the harbour; they continued it ashore in a great estate. Out of farm buildings they made seamanship demonstration rooms, armourers' equipment rooms. Out of the pig-sty in the centre they made a demonstration gun-site.

A score of these boys went out to the East Indies, and a new college was begun at Surabaya. And to them a replica of the Vaandel was sent—the guarantee of the continuity of the Royal Navy of the Netherlands.

Meanwhile from other ports the surviving units of the Dutch Navy, one by one, made their escape. The half-finished destroyer *Isaac Sweers* was towed across, so was other new construction. Gunboats and boats that had survived the attacks of bombers got across under their own power, but even that withdrawal was attended with loss. The gunboat *Johan Maurits van Nassau*, fresh from stemming the German advance across the Zuiderzeedyke, was attacked by dive-bombers and lost.

The fight for Holland was over. There remained the last days of resistance in the south. All that a fighting force could do the Dutch Navy had done. They had held the northern arm of the German pincer; they had defied the tip of the southern arm in Rotterdam itself; they had fought between the narrow banks of rivers, on the edges of canals, in the basins of the harbours; they had fought on land. They had lost everything save honour—but that they had added to the great roll of the Navy of the Netherlands.

CHAPTER II

I

FOR the Dutch Navy there came a pause—one of those brief, almost breathless moments of stillness in the centre of enormous events; a moment like the silence in the heart of a hurricane.

Holland had crashed, and the echoes of her fall were still in the ears of her exiles. Across the narrow seas the battle of Belgium and of France was going on. The great epic of Dunkirk was telling itself to an astonished world. France, torn by the corruption of her politicians, the decadence of her rulers, was losing honour and integrity. Germany was advancing everywhere from the Rhine to the Loire.

But if the Dutch Navy as a whole was, for a moment, in a breathless waiting, elements of it were as hotly engaged in this struggle as any man. I remember a Dutch lieutenant at Ramsgate who went over and over again to the Dunkirk beaches. I have heard the story of a Dutchman who volunteered to go in again when Dunkirk was over. I saw the long flotillas of Dutch coasters passing to and fro, standing off the beaches under the shell-fire and the bombing. I saw Dutch fishing vessels, trawlers, drifters and the like, bringing back men. And down the coast of France Dutchmen were escaping through the long turmoil of the collapse.

I know one case of a Dutchman, now a Lieutenant in the Navy, who from a shipping office in Paris came down to Nantes and found there eight Dutch merchant ships caught in the whirlpool, uncertain not only of the future, but of the immediate present. He galvanised them into activity and order, jettisoned three hundred tons of cargo from one ship so that she would float across the bar, captured (literally) a pilot and almost at the pistol point forced him to take the little convoy out to sea. He brought them safely to England.

I have heard other stories of Dutch tugs down the French coast waiting to tow half-finished ships to Britain as they had towed their own new construction out of the very fingers of the Germans. One of the Dutch long-distance tugs lay off Brest waiting to take the great French battleship *Jean Bart* to Britain. The *Jean Bart*, incomplete, able to limp on one engine only, came down the harbour under her own steam and sailed past the tug ignoring her signals, heading south-west for Casablanca.

In sharp contrast to this the little gunnery training sloop *Van Kinsbergen* (1,760 tons and carrying four 4.7-inch guns) was already about to head out on a cruise that was to take her through sixty thousand miles of sea down and up the long line of the Atlantic. In the course of that cruise she sank or captured sixty-six thousand tons of enemy shipping, including the Hamburg-America motor-ship *Rhein*

of 6,000 tons, which she intercepted in West Indian waters. The crew of the *Rhein* set fire to their ship and scuttled her. Others, however, were successfully taken over by boarding parties from the *Van Kinsbergen*.

Meanwhile from the outer seas, from north by Iceland and Jan Mayen and the Greenland fishing grounds, the Dutch fishermen were coming back. They had left Holland riding uneasily the wind of events; now the gale had overwhelmed her, the flood of German power had swamped the ports and harbours of their return; they were left shelterless on a dangerous ocean. One by one they came in to British ports—to Scotland, to the east coast, to the south, joining the fleets of pilot vessels, coasters, lightships, tugs, harbour craft, barges and coastwise fishing-vessels that were sheltering there like seagulls blown against the cliffs of a lee shore.

II

Out of these remnants, out of the men of the Merchant Navy, out of the men of the escape, the Dutch Government fashioned a new Navy. It was begun tentatively, experimentally, but with a curious certainty of instinct. Britain then was desperately short of small craft for minesweeping, for patrol and other purposes. The Dutch gunboats that had got away went to the east coast convoys to help to guard them against the now most imminent threat of German intervention. Dutch minelayers that had come over with them took a brilliant part in the tangled North Sea mining that baffled the Germans for many months. The best of the fishing vessels were taken up and handed over to the British Admiralty for conversion. Their crews were taken, as crews, kept together, and trained in minesweeping.

Around the coasts of Britain Dutch Naval bases were set up. I visited one of them not long ago. It is a port that lies on one of the great natural harbours of Britain. Further than that it is not necessary to describe it, but for a note of its war-time importance it is proper to say that it has also been one of the most heavily mined harbours of all the British coasts. Night after night, for weeks on end at times, it has been the object of the minelaying 'planes that come in in the darkness to drop their canisters of high explosive in the pathway of the ships. There the Royal Netherlands Navy has set up a minesweeping organisation. They have their own section of the base, their own barracks, their own canteen and seamen's club; and they have, lying at the buoys of the harbour, their own flotillas of sweepers.

In the chill silence of dawn I went out to them. I went out in a Dutch drifter skippered by a Vlissingen pilot. The ship bore her old fishing name, but she carried upon her funnel chevrons, and each chevron denoted three mines exploded. We slipped out and headed

down the harbour, and as we went we streamed the sweep. Details of these things I may not give. They are amongst the scientific miracles of this war, part of that swift reaction of British technical genius that outwitted the secret weapon that Hitler had believed would paralyse the shipping lanes of Britain.

One after another behind us came fresh trawlers—Dutch all of them—until the tale of our flotilla was complete. They call these ships "the babies." They are small, working inside the harbour, but because they work inside the harbour they do not work free of danger. As we went down the stillness, with hill and tree and harbour reflected flawlessly on the mirror of the water, they pointed out to me where, on such a morning as this, within a hundred-and-fifty yards of the shore, one of "the babies" had set off a mine, and had disappeared with every man of her company. Further down the harbour they showed me the masthead of a pilot cutter, one of the little cutters that had lain in peace-time in all weathers off the Scheldt or the Texel Roads to put the Dutch pilots aboard incoming vessels.

And all the while as we went down we swept for possible mines. There had been no 'planes in the night before, but there is always the possibility of a left-over from an earlier raid. We found nothing, though we turned and came back down the harbour again, sweeping past the anchored ships of the convoys, in past the naval vessels of the inner anchorage, round and out again to the harbour mouth, until every inch of the tortured sea-bottom of the harbour had been covered and we were certain that the ships might go by in safety. And not until we made to the waiting land, where the sun had come up over the hills and the smoke was showing above the houses, the signal "Sweep completed" did the harbour come to life.

And then, first of all the movement was another little flotilla, its leaders this time Dutch again—bigger trawlers these, long-distance ships of that fleet that was caught out on the empty ocean after Holland fell. With their after-decks cluttered with floats and wires, the kites and doors of the Oropesa sweep, they passed us to clear the outer channels of the ingenuities of the enemy. British ships went with them, too, for, at this station as at all the stations where the Netherlands Navy operates, the first and most important principle of their work is the principle of co-operation.

Another morning I went out with the Oropesa trawlers. The ship I was in was going out after a brief spell in which she had been fitted with a new gun. They were most anxious to try that gun. I found with these men of the trawlers that they had a grievance—one grievance only—and that was that they had so small a chance of direct contact with a possible enemy. They wanted most desperately to be able to hit out at Germans. It was their one ambition. They worked in exile, an exile of two years far from the shallow waters of the low coast-

line of the Netherlands. From this port they could not even see into the great, shallow basin of the North Sea. It is a port that is used predominantly by British ships. There must be times when in this monotonous, arduous, unceasing work of the sweeping they wonder how their work affects the direct salvation of their homeland. And yet there was nothing of this in their grievance. The grievance was only that they could not hit out visibly at Germans.

Meanwhile, in case opportunity should arise, in case the stray, inquisitive plane should come their way, or by some miracle a long-range E-boat lose itself in the waters of their sweep, they were anxious to practise that new gun.

But before we could get to the clear water I saw, for one little instant, the reality of their attitude to the war. Far out to the southward the port lookout spotted an aircraft. It was flying towards us, a four-engined plane. Five blobs, fuselage and engines, against the thread of the wing seen from ahead—there was no telling what she might be. That sea has been swept often enough even in daylight by the German raider. I saw the alarm bell pressed. Even before it had ceased its clangour the new gun and the other guns of the ship were manned. There was no fuss, no excitement—only the gunners were ready with their fingers on the triggers, and on the bridge the signalman was making the challenge. There was a brief delay while tension mounted, and then from the plane came a winking answer—friendly. The tension relaxed.

We went on to the practice ground, streamed a target—it carried a painted head of Hitler—and began the practice. I would not like to face the Dutchmen even of that little ship as an enemy.

When the practice was over we went out to our appointed position, turned, streamed the sweep and came in, with the gay little flagstaff of the Oropesa float sending up a spurt of spray like the periscope of a submarine and the taut wire singing over our stern. No mines again.

The mining campaign of Germany has been one of the great failures of the Reich this war. It had in it the potential of success. The magnetic mine, though it was not in itself new, had been enormously and elaborately developed by the German Navy. Had it been manufactured in vast quantities and utilised in a single, tremendous laying in every stretch of shoal water about the United Kingdom, in every harbour and entrance channel, it might have dealt us a crippling blow. As it was, laid tentatively before it was really in full production, its laying spread out over a long period so that Britain had time to find out and discover its secrets and devise its counter measures, it caused heavy and grievous loss, but it did not cripple. Its developments have been kept under since then by the devoted work of the mine-sweeping flotillas of the coasts, and in that work the Dutch flotillas

here, and at a port to the northward, and at yet a third base, have played a splendid part.

Something of this story I heard as we came sliding in over the easy swell, clearing a channel astern of us. And, as we came to the headland of the harbour, we saw, coming up over the horizon in our wake, the ranked ships of another convoy come safely in to port.

We made the last leg of the journey with the crew chipping paint amidships, repainting the funnel and the boat-skids and the fiddley casing. And as they painted ship, they sang. There is a fine spirit in these men; they can still sing in exile.

And that cheerful sound was made poignant as, against its background, I heard some of their stories of escape. One officer had hidden his wife under a concrete pier at Flushing while the raiders smashed the harbour, had put her in the morning on the tiniest of coasters, had seen her go off, and had then turned back into the town to wait for orders. I heard how the canoe that he and a friend had prepared for their own escape as Holland crashed behind them, had been stolen; how the yacht on which he had next pinned his faith had been marooned in the empty canals of Flushing by the blowing of the lock-gates; how from a rowing boat he had been picked up at sea and brought first to Dunkirk and then to England.

And they told me how in this harbour on the deck of the minesweeper they had christened the infant son that had been born after his wife had got safe to England, christened him in the up-turned ship's bell that did duty as a font.

III

The minesweeping bases were established, the gunboats took up their work, and to them in course of time were added new craft—the old American destroyer *Campbeltown*, motor torpedo-boats, M.L.s and eventually motor gunboats. But these things, in the tremendous fight for bare existence following the collapse of France, took time to produce.

Meanwhile, out in the Far East, the major part of the Dutch Navy, intact, unconquered, was waiting on another foe; “standing by,” in the naval phrase, in instant readiness for the attack they knew must come.

There was, however, still one section of the Dutch Navy remaining—the submarines in Home Waters, ships that had not yet gone out to the Far East, that were not then considered essential in that area. The record of their voyages and of their exploits takes its place as an equal chapter with the great records of the British submarine service. In the middle of the war it is impossible to cover all their adventurings, nor would a survey of this kind permit of such detail, it is better there-

fore to take one or two type examples and let them stand for the whole.

On November 25th, 1941, a Dutch submarine under Lieutenant-Commander J. F. van Dulm was cruising in the Western Mediterranean. The night was calm and there was a bright moon. And in the track of the moon, where it lay broad and brilliant across the water, Commander van Dulm sighted a German U-boat, U 95. Making his attacking position swiftly and incisively, van Dulm fired two torpedoes. One torpedo scraped the target, the other struck the afterpart of the U-boat and exploded with tremendous violence. The whole stern of the German submarine was blown off, and she sank within seven seconds. Four officers, including her commander, Kapitanleutnant Gert Schreiber, and eight ratings survived. They had been on the conning tower, save for one who was in the control room, and had been blown out by the force of the explosion.

U 95 was a 500-ton ship, built at the Germania yard at Kiel, and commissioned in June of 1940. Prior to her sinking she had carried out six cruises, and Schreiber claimed to have sunk sixty thousand tons of shipping. At ten thousand tons a cruise she scarcely seems to have achieved a notable success. She sailed on her last voyage from Lorient on November 16th, passed through the Straits of Gibraltar at night (presumably, after the custom of both German and Italian submarines, in the Spanish territorial waters of the southern side), and had found no targets in the four days which she had spent in the Mediterranean. Schreiber had been awarded the Iron Cross, first class, in November of 1940.

van Dulm, who had already won the British D.S.O., was for this exploit awarded a bar to the decoration. One of his lieutenants received the D.S.C. and the torpedo coxswain and a leading seaman the D.S.M.

Even in the swift drama of that disaster there was comedy, for when the survivors came aboard their commander began a harangue immediately he recovered his breath. van Dulm remarked afterwards :

But I said, "No speeches in my ship!" and rushed the prisoners below under an armed guard. Some of them wore lifebelts. We removed these in order to search the prisoners. The Germans protested, saying that they might be sent to Canada as prisoners of war and would need their lifebelts then. I told them they would be quite safe in a British convoy. That made them mad! We gave them coffee, cocoa and food. Their captain ate in the wardroom, but I am afraid a big picture of Winston Churchill on the wall quite spoiled his appetite. The wardroom is very small. No matter which way the German turned, the British Prime Minister was still looking at him!

In home waters close to their own coasts and in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean the Dutch-submarines also played an important part. In that great period between August and September, when enemy ships were being sunk in the Mediterranean at the rate of one

a day by the Navy and the Air Force, they had a heavy share. All through the end of 1940 and 1941 little notes appeared in the British communiqués :

A Dutch submarine sank an enemy supply ship sailing in convoy and severely damaged an enemy auxiliary.

A Dutch submarine sank an enemy tanker of about 7,000 tons and an enemy supply ship of about 500 tons. The Dutch submarine found herself surrounded by a number of enemy submarine chasers. The Commander decided to surface and by skilful manœuvring and hitting back with continuous shell-fire, escaped his assailants.

A Dutch submarine sank a 1,200-ton Italian sailing vessel by gun-fire. It also torpedoed an Italian supply ship of 6,000 tons which was seen to sink by the stern. Both vessels were laden.

It can now be stated that the 6,000-ton enemy supply ship recently announced as sunk by a Netherlands submarine was the Italian steamship *Isargo*.

And throughout these and numerous other exploits the Dutch submarine service retained a reputation for humanity and gallantry that will stand for all time. It has a long record of seamen rescued from the sea, of distressed crews (the crew of the *Isargo* was one of them) picked up and brought to port, of enemy survivors rescued.

And there is another side to those brief announcements : "The Admiralty regrets to announce the loss of a Dutch submarine in Allied naval operations." More than once that brief announcement has put an end to the history of a gallant ship and a gallant crew in that fighting.

IV

To balance against our submarine campaign (mainly directed against German fighting ships and the supply lines of Rommel's army) the Allies suffered enormous losses from the German U-boats.

Here again Holland's ships took their part—not only the magnificent men of the Dutch Merchant Navy, but the men who for generations in peace-time had led the world in deep-sea salvage and long-distance towing. They were drawn into the British rescue tug organisation. Operating from Wales, from Northern Ireland, from Scotland and from British ports, these tugs have helped almost incredibly to alleviate the distress and dangers of the U-boat campaign.

When I went to them at a northern port many months ago now, they had already brought in 1,300,000 tons of damaged shipping. Heaven knows what that total is to-day ! And at that port I saw one of them. No one—not even her captain, I think—would call her beautiful. High bowed, chunky, broad for her length, she is a tug. There is no other description possible.

Something of that total of 1,300,000 tons was what the tug people

call "Marine risks," that is, the natural risk of man against the sea. In 1941, in one of the bad winter gales, the 4,935-ton steamer *Macbeth* broke down in mid-Atlantic. She was slightly nearer the Canadian side, and from the Canadian base the British tug *Prudent* was sent to tow her in. To find a ship in the centre of a winter ocean without the constant use of wireless is as near impossible as makes no difference. The *Prudent* found her and took her in tow. But again the weather played its part. Head winds of constant gale force held the two ships pinned. They had made not four hundred miles when *Prudent* was left with barely enough fuel herself to get back to Canada.

The *Macbeth* was left again, a sitting target for U-boats. This time it was decided to send a Dutch tug out from the British side. Through appalling weather she smashed her way across. Her lifeboat was carried away, her jolly boat washed overboard, the rafts smashed; she suffered damage about the decks. At times she could make only five knots, but she too found the *Macbeth*.

Pumping oil over the sea to get a little factitious calm, she closed the *Macbeth* on the starboard side; got under her so close that the ships were almost in collision; sent a heaving line across, followed that with a three-inch manilla and at the end of that made fast the towing wire. The *Macbeth* had no steam for winches or anchor windlass, and, reeling and staggering on her decks, her entire crew hauled on the wire by hand. After a fantastic struggle they got that wire made fast.

By this time the *Prudent* had come out again, but she was ordered back to base, and the Dutch tug started her tow through hail and snowstorms. And then, as if the weather had relented, it began slowly to clear. For nine hundred miles the tow went on and the *Macbeth* was brought through submarines, through German aircraft, through the utmost threat of weather, safely to port.

V

Throughout this period, save for a brief spell of cruiser activity at the beginning—it was a cruiser of the Netherlands Navy that took Princess Juliana and the royal children to Canada—the largest Dutch ships operating in western waters were destroyers.

One of them, *Campbeltown*, one of the fifty American "tin can" destroyers, was among them. No one will claim that the "tin cans" were perfect ships, but they served a vital purpose at a most crucial time, and the work they did will find its due and proper appreciation in the history of the war. As Captain W. Harmsen, *Campbeltown's* commander, said once to Admiral Noble, "They are the best ships in the Atlantic, for they do the same work as the new destroyers, and when one is torpedoed it costs nothing."

Campbeltown served on the western approaches, the main danger

zone of the early submarine campaigns, and during the six months she was on convoy duty only five ships were torpedoed and two bombed out of a total of three hundred and seventy escorted by her.

One of those was a straggler, a tanker. The membership of the "Stragglers Club," as it is grimly known, is very high. The U-boats lie astern of the convoys like vultures waiting for the feeble. *Campbeltown*, falling back, had found her straggler partly crippled with engine trouble, and for many hours screened her patiently while she made frantic efforts to adjust the trouble. But, the convoy was more important than the lame ship—*Campbeltown* was ordered to rejoin.

No sooner had she gone back than the frightened wireless told her of bomber attack. The ship had been hit and set on fire. *Campbeltown* went racing back to her aid, found her abandoned by her crew, blazing, and the ammunition aboard exploding. Captain Harmsen put *Campbeltown* alongside, connected up all the ship's fire hoses, pumped for four hours, and finally extinguished the fire. The tanker was towed into the Clyde in safety.

In the winter of 1941 *Campbeltown* was handed back to the British Navy to achieve immortal fame in the lock-gate of St. Nazaire.

By contrast there was the *Isaac Sweers*. More than any other ship does she epitomise this rehabilitation, this phoenix-like arising of a new Navy from the ashes of destruction. The *Isaac Sweers* was towed out of a falling Holland under the very eyes of the enemy. She was not a fighting ship; she was the hulk—the raw material, as it were—of a destroyer. But though building plans and blue prints had not come with her, from that unfinished mass they fashioned in British shipyards a new destroyer. And their work was done so well that before her first year was completed, though she had started in the period of urgency without proper trials, she steamed 70,000 miles—1,500 miles a week—without overhaul.

The *Isaac Sweers* was a large destroyer of the most modern type, and immediately on her completion she was sent to the Mediterranean to work with the fine ships of the British "Tribal" class. Her record there in her first period of service was admirable, and in December of 1941 she was a full and valued member of the glorious fellowship of the Mediterranean destroyers.

On the 13th December aerial reconnaissance located an important Italian force approaching the Libyan coast. Continuous observation was maintained on the force until a division of Allied destroyers consisting of H.M.S. *Sikh*, H.M.S. *Legion*, H.M.S. *Maori* and the *Isaac Sweers* made contact with the enemy. The Italian force consisted of the two cruisers *Alberico da Barbiano* and *Alberto di Giussano* of 5,100-tons protected by a screen of motor torpedo-boats and light craft. The force was, therefore, very considerably superior in fire power, range and weight of metal to our own.

Under cover of the winter darkness the Allied division, led by *Sikh*, raced in, to attack. The last moment of that race must have been amongst the most dramatic of the war. For success there was one essential and one only—we had to achieve absolute and complete surprise. Failure to make torpedo range unseen would have brought into play the heavier armament of the Italians, enable them to dispose their light craft in attack, and given them the opportunity of using their superior speed to escape or to avoid torpedoes.

The Allied division, however, was brilliantly handled. Slipping inside the Italian forces and the shore, *Sikh* reached torpedo range unseen, fired two torpedoes, and saw both hit. Instantly the night was brilliant as flame made an inferno of the ship, spreading out in a roaring stream as fuel tanks were ignited from stern to stern. Her magazines went, and she heeled over and began to sink.

Meanwhile, and in the same split second almost, *Legion* fired at the second cruiser. The torpedoes this time did not set fire to her at once, but broke her back.

The escort, caught completely unawares, seemed paralysed by the shock of the loss of the big ships, and for long minutes was helpless while *Maori* and *Isaac Sweers* concentrated their fire on the blazing ship, and *Legion* and *Sikh* completed the destruction of the second. One small Italian destroyer, however, attempted fight, and narrowly escaped collision with the *Isaac Sweers*, whose gunners, at a range of feet almost, poured in a hail of shell as she passed.

Meanwhile the motor torpedo-boats and small craft, seen as blobs on the water, were fired on and sunk. From the air the reconnaissance planes that had kept so brilliant a watch on the white foam of the enormous wakes, saw the battle blaze from the first explosion until in pools of flame-flecked oil the enemy disappeared.

In twenty minutes the fight was over—twenty of the most hectic minutes of destroyer action inside the history of this war; a brilliant attack, admirably conceived, superbly handled, in which each unit fought in the knowledge of perfect timing, perfect co-ordination, perfect comradeship.

The *Isaac Sweers* was worthy of her place in one of the great "divisions" of British destroyer history.

CHAPTER III

I

IN the stillness of the Sunday morning of December 7th Japan struck. She struck not at the Dutch East Indies, but four thousand miles away across the island-studded Pacific at Pearl Harbour in the islands of Hawaii.

But the first bomb that fell on the great American naval base was dropped equally against the Netherlands. Since November 13th ships of the Royal Netherlands Navy had been at sea. Far beyond the islands submarines had established patrol lines. Inshore of them destroyers watched the main channels and passages through the complex of the islands. The Netherlands East Indies, closer to Japan than the United States, had no faith in the negotiations—no trust in the word of the Japanese. From the patrolling aircraft that beyond even the submarine lines watched the surface of the sea there came messages of Japanese warships moving south, transport convoys at the entrances to the Gulf of Siam, where the treachery of Vichy France had given to Japan the incalculable advantage of the stepping-stone of Indo-China, with its great strategic harbour of Camranh Bay.

On the Saturday night the submarine commanded by Lieutenant-Commander A. J. Bussemaker sighted two Japanese destroyers steaming without lights. Simultaneously she was spotted by the ships who, using searchlights, picked her up in the blackness. She dived, and no attack was made.

The following morning Commander Bussemaker picked up the first war signal. That day he cruised without sighting anything, but the following evening in the bad visibility of tropic rain-squalls he sighted an enemy transport in the distance. After a chase that lasted all night, he had to abandon the pursuit in the dawn of the Monday morning. But it was clear from this that he was on the route of the Japanese transport, and, lying on the bottom for the rest of that day, he came up again with the darkness.

Early in the night a troopship heading in the direction of Patani was sighted. Again the submarine began the stalk. The South China Sea is a place of execrable navigation. Coral reefs, shoals, tiny islets stud it in a wild confusion. Near the coasts of the Malayan Peninsula mud-banks and sand stretch for miles.

Bussemaker found swiftly that the water was so shallow that he could not proceed submerged. He surfaced and slowly nosed his way through the shallows until he was inside the wide bay near Patani. Not until he was well inside did he find that he had poked his nose fairly into a hornets' nest of Japanese shipping. There were at least three more heavily laden transports already anchored in the roadstead.

In two-and-a-half fathoms of water—fifteen feet—barely enough to float a submarine on the surface—he made the firing position. Again and again the submarine shuddered to the deep hiss of the release of the torpedoes. There was the inevitable anxious wait while the "fish" ran in towards the targets. There followed six explosions. Bussemaker turned his ship as swiftly as he could and dodged his way out to the open sea again.

All the rest of the week the submarine cruised up and down her patrol area. Targets were seen in the far distance; opportunities of attack did not present themselves. There were long blank stretches, and then, on the night of December 13th, she was cruising on the surface again, searching through the darkness for the enemy. Without warning there was a violent explosion. Bussemaker and five other men on the bridge were thrown into the water. The submarine herself sank in less than a minute, and Bussemaker was killed.

They were many miles from the nearest island, but the water was warm and calm, and though they had no hope of boat or flotation gear of any sort, they decided to swim for it. There are few things more tragic than that swim. One by one exhaustion or sharks took the men. During the night one of the seamen; at daybreak the First Lieutenant; at midday another man; in the afternoon a fourth: one man alone, Quartermaster de Wolf, kept afloat. All that night he swam. At dawn he was still moving slowly. At ten o'clock in the morning, nearly thirty-six hours after the disaster, he landed on a small uninhabited island. There was neither water nor food there, but sleep refreshed him a little. And the following morning a native craft found him on the beach, and he reached the Malayan coast and eventually Singapore. He was awarded the D.S.M. To Lieutenant-Commander Bussemaker the D.S.O. was posthumously awarded.

It is impossible to give accounts of all the work of the submarines of the Dutch East Indies Command. From the Gulf of Siam to the New Guinea coast they ranged, watching, giving warning of impending invasion attempts, attacking. One more was lost before the year was out, another in January. But before they went they acquitted themselves magnificently.

By December 30th it was claimed by the Netherlands East Indies Command that one Japanese cruiser, one destroyer, one tanker, four transports, three freighters, four supply transports and one lighter had been sunk. The majority of these were accounted for by torpedoes from the Dutch submarines.

The submarine under the command of Lieutenant C. A. J. van Well Groeneveld, for example, sank three transports and a tanker in a heavily escorted convoy in the Strait of Api. The convoy was sighted by a Dutch flying boat at a distance of fifty miles. In a brilliant piece of co-operation Groeneveld's submarine made contact with the enemy; and, while the flying boat diverted the attention of the air escort of the convoy, made an attacking position. In her first attack she hit a transport, and immediately after the explosion members of her crew describe the decks of the stricken ship "with flashlights swarming like fireflies" as Japanese soldiers on board attempted to launch boats. A transport almost rammed the submarine, and immediately afterwards a destroyer began dropping depth charges. But,

despite these, Groeneveld got in a second attack, and some time later, after re-loading his tubes, a third. Four ships were definitely sunk.

There was another submarine which, closing with an enemy convoy heavily escorted, attacked and sank two Japanese troopships. Her captain, Lieutenant-Commander Snippe, attempted to get his ship away, but she was attacked at once from all directions by destroyers. Pounded by depth charges, battered from all sides, she stuck it out until no fewer than a hundred and ninety-five depth charges had been dropped in her vicinity, many of them extremely close. With her lighting system out of action, her crew waited in darkness for what seemed the inevitable end. The hundred and ninety-fifth charge, falling very close to the hull, shattered the instruments inside it and wrecked the ship's diving gear.

As it was impossible to manœuvre the ship under water, Commander Snippe brought her to surface, and, instead of surrendering, immediately manned his gun and opened fire on the enemy destroyers. Before the surprised enemy could take any action he had obtained a number of hits; but under the concentrated and infinitely heavier fire of the Japanese destroyers the submarine was repeatedly hit and finally foundered, holed in a dozen places.

Her crew took to the water, and after many hours were picked up by Japanese destroyers, taken to Saigon and imprisoned there. From Saigon they were removed to Hong Kong, where two of the lieutenants planned an escape.

They had first to get off the island of Hong Kong and, after wandering for seven days, they obtained from a friendly Chinese a small fishing boat and a supply of food, and reached the mainland. With only the roughest of maps and a vague general idea of direction, they set out on the thousand-mile march that lay between them and India. Six weeks later, after extraordinary sufferings, they limped into Kunning and fell in with an American Colonel who provided them with a lorry and passage on a 'plane bound for Calcutta. A few days later they were in Colombo and back on board a ship of the Royal Netherlands Navy.

II

All through this period the flying boats and long-range reconnaissance aircraft maintained a superb co-operation with the units of the Netherlands Fleet. The first phase of the East Indies campaign saw the Japanese concentrating on the conquest of the Philippines and of Malaya. As an early counterblow the Allies took over the almost undefended Portuguese sector of the island of Timor, and on the long chain from Kota Raja at the north end of Sumatra to New Guinea,

the people of the Netherlands East Indies waited in the grim knowledge of inevitable attack.

It came first in the north as, using the Philippines as half-way bases, the Japanese were able to bring their air cover over British North Borneo. The Japanese campaign was brilliantly conceived and brilliantly executed. Using every possible advantage that was given them by temporary naval superiority in the Western Pacific, utilising the fullest possible power that was given them by the co-operation between aircraft and surface vessels, utilising their central base of French Indo-China and the easy stepping-stone arrangement of the islands of the China Seas, their progress was inevitable.

The Allies never recovered from the early disasters, from the loss of H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and H.M.S. *Repulse* off the Malayan coast, from the initial failures to prevent landings north of Khota Bharu, from the American losses in Luzon and about Manila. The enormous preoccupations of the Allies in the other seas and in the land areas of Europe and Africa and Russia prevented the sending of adequate reinforcements. In a little it became apparent that nothing stood between the Japanese and complete victory in the south-west Pacific area save the small Dutch Navy, reinforced by units of the American, British, Australian and New Zealand forces.

Late in January there were indications of a Japanese move towards the south. The Celebes had already been attacked. The Japanese were in control in the northern part of Borneo. Tarakan, the Dutch base on the east coast, close to the British sector, had fallen, and with it the Dutch minelayer *Prins van Oranje*. The Dutch communiqué said simply: "It is assumed that she did not escape from Tarakan after carrying out her last orders." All through the campaign that was the spirit of the Netherlands Navy—the orders were carried out.

Dutch aircraft and submarines with those of the Allies worked desperately in an attempt to discover in time the movements of the Japanese. Heavy cloud hampered for the first two days the work of the reconnaissance planes. But on January 23rd an enemy convoy of about twenty-three ships was sighted under a low cloud in the Macassar Strait. It was nearing the Balikpapan area, having apparently come down close to the coast of Celebes before it crossed. It consisted of two lines of transports protected by cruisers and destroyers, and flying a high balloon barrage.

Under intense anti-aircraft fire the Dutch aircraft went into the attack and scored a number of hits. Darkness put an end to the attack, but on the second day the convoy was re-located and attacked anew. Again hits were scored and ships sunk. During that night landings were, however, established at Balikpapan, the Dutch oil port on the east coast of Borneo; and the first objective of the convoy having been reached, some of the escort left.

Further support, however, was given to the convoy by 'planes from an aircraft carrier which operated some forty miles distant. On the fourth day American aircraft with some American destroyers and a Dutch submarine joined in the attack, and though the precise results are even now obscure owing to the extraordinary difficulties of observing the results of air attack against heavy defences, it is believed that of this original convoy and other convoys which joined it subsequently, thirty-two ships were sunk, set on fire or heavily damaged, while sixteen Japanese aircraft were destroyed.

It was assumed at the time that this convoy was aimed at Java, and undue optimism was aroused by the fact that it did not proceed farther south. But, damaging though the attack was, it is now certain that the destination of the convoy was Balikpapan, and despite losses and the very large number of Japanese troops known to have been drowned, that objective was achieved.

III

Swiftly the tide of Japanese achievement was spreading over the islands. Already the Japanese Army had come half-way down the Malayan Peninsula. Borneo and Celebes were under Japanese domination, and the next move was to the east.

On February 1st the northern Dutch naval base of Amboina in the Moluccas was attacked in strength. On that day coastal batteries sank by shelling one cruiser and one destroyer. The following day the admirable work of the Dutch minelayers took its toll. A Japanese cruiser ran into the minefield laid at the entrance to Amboina Bay and disappeared within a few minutes. On the following day it is believed that a submarine was accounted for by a minefield in another part of the island. On February 5th a third Japanese cruiser ran into another minefield, and six heavy explosions took place.

Despite these heavy losses, Amboina fell. Fighting went on for some time, but Holland and the Allies had lost another important focal point of the defences.

Then, a day or two later, Surabaya, the main Dutch naval base on the north side of the great island of Java, was heavily attacked from the air. Japan was getting desperately close. On February 15th resistance ended in Singapore. Japan had complete mastery over the continental sectors. Borneo was virtually lost save for guerilla resistance in the interior. Celebes was gone save for men who fought gallantly in the mountains. The Moluccas were gone. Sumatra was invaded, and with the small number of troops available, was indefensible.

Gradually the tide of Japanese victory flooded in towards the last line of defences. From the east, from the north, from the west, Java was encircled. There lay one hope—and one hope only—and that

was in a naval defeat of the invasion convoys that each man in the East Indies knew must swiftly come. And there was small hope of such a victory, for already the Allied forces that were left after the sinking of the two British capital ships were small, and even their small number had suffered damage.

Japan, in point of fact, claimed to have sunk the whole Netherlands Navy.

In Java they waited gallantly upon the hour.

IV

And at sea the Allied force, under Admiral Doorman, began to throw its weight against the close-range investment of the island. On February 15th, as Singapore fell, his force was sweeping up to the north of the island of Banka, which lies off the east of Sumatra.

The Japanese, by-passing Singapore, had attacked Palembang and dropped parachutists supported by motor-boats, invasion barges and a sea force. The oil installations joined the smoke of the great holocaust of the East Indian Empire. The tiny land forces struggled grimly against the invader.

Admiral Doorman failed to find the Japanese landing force. But the Japanese bombers found the Allied Striking Force. No fighter protection was available, and for seven hours the little fleet was bombed. Between forty and sixty bombers took part in this attack. *Houston*, the heavy ship of the American reinforcement, had been hit on February 27th. Now *Marblehead* was hit; other ships were damaged. Admiral Doorman headed through Sunda Strait to find cover in the depths of the open sea. When the last of the raids was over, when the last attacker had lost them, they came up to the coast again and concentrated at Tjilatjap. Sumatra was falling, the enemy was at the western gate of Java—remained the eastern.

Almost at once came a cry of "Help!" from Bali—Bali, the exquisite island of dancing girls, pearl in the long chain of the Indies. A Japanese transport force, strongly protected by naval vessels, was approaching its lovely shores.

They put out from Tjilatjap at speed: *De Ruyter*, *Java*, *Piet Hein* and two American destroyers, U.S.S. *Ford* and *Pope*. The British cruisers had gone to help in the terrible aftermath of Singapore. *Tromp* was at Surabaya with four other American destroyers—*Stewart*, *Parrott*, *Edwards* and *Pillsbury*. It was decided that the Allied Striking Force should attack in two groups, one coming from Tjilatjap, the other from Surabaya.

Bali is separated from Java by the narrow Bali Strait, scarcely a mile wide in parts. Between Bali and Lombok, the next great island of the chain, is Lombok Strait, wide and astonishingly beautiful. The

coast of Bali from its eastern extremity to the South Cape swings in a hollow demilune. Poised in this, like a star in the crescent moon, is Penida Island, separated from Bali's mainland by the dog-legged Badoeng Strait.

In the light of the moon is the aerodrome of Den Passar, almost on the beach itself. This was the Japanese objective. In one forceful rush they over-ran the garrison. The intervention of the Fleet was too late. As it came from the Indian Ocean, heading up the Badoeng Strait, the ground was covered. Save for the flashes of sporadic resistance they could see nothing. The night was intensely dark, and the heavy shore of Bali overhung the darkness of the sea like a velvet cloud.

And into that darkness they plunged desperately to the attack. They could still see nothing. All the light there was in the night was behind them: what advantage there was, was to the enemy.

And yet they achieved surprise—surprise so absolute, so complete, that it almost overwhelmed their purpose; for *De Ruyter*, in the van, racing in at full speed, found herself before she knew it in the very centre of the anchored Japanese. She passed through them so close that her heavy guns could not be trained swiftly enough to take each succeeding target. It was like trying to fire at people standing on the platform from a racing express train. She passed up the anchorage roaring.

And, astern of her, *Java* had the advantage of the light that she had made. Pouring in a wicked fire from every gun, heavy and light, that would bear, she raced astern of her leader through the Fleet.

And behind her came *Piet Hein*, and *Piet Hein* took the brunt of the Japanese defence. The few moments' lag on the Japanese ships between surprise and action let through the cruisers. The *Piet Hein* was hit in a matter of swift seconds by twelve 8-inch shells from a Japanese heavy cruiser. Her after-magazine caught fire, and, as she carried her way through the Fleet, it was clear that she was doomed. Her crew—those of them who were alive—took to the rafts.

And astern of her again came the two Americans—old "tin can" destroyers, flush-deckers, achieving in this action the very summit of their glory. They raced through, slipping to starboard and to port of the anchored columns, firing off their outfit of torpedoes. Fish after fish hit home. They left the anchorage blazing with burning shipping, and again the Bali night was quiet save for the distant roar of flames.

Admiral Doorman took his force north out of range; and then, three hours later, *Tromp* and the four U.S. destroyers—*Stewart*, *Parrott*, *Edwards* and *Pillsbury*—roaring down through Bali Strait, hurtling round the South Cape, urgent to join the battle line, came to the anchorage in their turn. Again this second attack achieved a measure of surprise. Perhaps the Japanese did not believe such fanatic courage

possible. *Tromp*, with the American destroyers, raced at her utmost speed into the anchorage. The light had improved now, and she could see the ships. She opened fire before she was up with them, firing rapidly on the port hand at an angle of sixty degrees off the bow. And as her shells carried fair amongst them a searchlight broke out broad on her starboard quarter and she heard the crash of heavy guns. Against the dark shore of Penida there was an 8-inch cruiser anchored, and unable to reply, with her turrets trained over on the port side, she took the first salvoes without answer. Her fire control was hit, she was heavily damaged, men were killed on the shambles on her decks; but her light armament rose magnificently to the wild extremity. Pouring in everything they had from Bofors guns and light automatics, *Tromp* put out the blazing searchlight, swept the Jap's decks, and, as the main armament swung round into action, silenced the heavy cruiser. The American destroyers, ahead of *Tromp*, had got in their hits in turn against the battered fleet of the invasion.

And astern of this group, far away in the darkness of the night, there was a third attempt. M.T.B.s, racing across the still water, searched in Badoeng and Lombok Straits for the enemy, but the Japanese had withdrawn to the north.

And yet there *was* a third battle in that night. Survivors from *Piet Hein*, men and women escaping from Bali in a yacht, people on the shore, all saw this third action. No man knows who fought it. Gun-flashes of ships firing against each other were clear in the darkness; hits were seen. But there were no Allied ships there. The Japanese, their nerves raw from the two attacks, must have opened fire upon each other.

Next morning aerial reconnaissance located a Japanese 8-inch cruiser in tow of another limping to the northward at eight knots. The anchorage of Badoeng Channel was empty. There were no ships left.

V

On February 11th Admiral Hart of the U.S. Navy was recalled to Washington to take up another appointment. Admiral Helfrich, Dutch Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies, succeeded to the command of the Allied naval forces in the A.B.D.A. area. The original A.B.D.A. area had included all the waters of the great triangle that had for its base the islands from Sumatra to New Guinea and for its apex the Philippines. Now it was grievously diminished. From a vast triangle with sides of three thousand miles it was shrunk to the narrow shores of Java.

Sumatra to the west was falling. Everywhere the Japanese were sweeping in. To the east they had landed on Bali. The southern shore of Borneo was theirs and the islands of the Java Sea.

As his force gathered again after the action off Bali, Admiral Helfrich knew that it had one purpose and one purpose only—it was to be thrown in in a last attempt to break the Japanese invasion in the shallow waters north of Java. Night after night Rear-Admiral Doorman, in command of the Allied Striking Force, put out from Surabaya to sweep the northern coast.

De Ruyter and *Java*, *Exeter*, *Houston* and *Perth* were all his cruisers now. The others were sunk or so damaged as to be out of action. He had no heavy ships. He had only three British destroyers, two Dutch and four small Americans—fourteen ships altogether, nine of them little ones, against all the power and might of the Japanese Navy, against all the weight that they could throw upon the air, from under the sea, from its surface.

A Dutch officer has written of that time: "After the fall of Singapore we no longer had any illusions about our 'chances'; in the event of a landing on Java, the Fleet was to be flung in in its entirety. That was exactly what we wanted, but we did not expect to come out of it alive." In that magnificent spirit the last days of Java ran slowly out.

At dawn the sweeps ended and the ships came back to Surabaya—and by breakfast-time they were being bombed. British anti-aircraft guns kept the bombers high, but the attacks were determined. Groups of nine 'planes in close formation dropped all their bombs simultaneously. On one occasion more than eighty were counted at the same time over Surabaya. The harbour and its installations were wrecked. The old training cruiser, *Soerabaja*, obsolete and of little fighting value, was sunk at her moorings. Subsequently two Dutch and one American destroyers, a Dutch submarine and several smaller craft were lost to these attacks.

But the most serious result of this bombing was that the men of the fighting Navy got no sleep. All night they stood at action stations while the sweeps went on. All day they manned the anti-aircraft guns and listened to the thud and thunder of falling bombs.

On the night of Thursday, February 26th, the ships of the squadron were sweeping to the north of Madura. They sighted no enemy, but at dawn the routine of many days was suddenly changed. Instead of re-entering the western fairway to refuel at Surabaya, they stood out into the Java Sea westerly. There was a brief air attack. That passed over. After that there was nothing save reconnaissance 'planes. They were watched in every moment of their movements. This sweep too found nothing.

At length Admiral Doorman brought the Fleet round and began to return. His men were utterly exhausted: heat, lack of sleep, endless exertion were taking their toll. They came back to the coast and were moving through the channels in the minefields at the western fairway when they received a signal from a Catalina flying-boat on reconnais-

sance that the enemy had been sighted, a transport fleet of forty-five large vessels to the northward escorted by an overwhelming strength of naval craft.

The squadron turned ; and here again one of the miracles of war took place—fatigue, that had brought them almost to the point of desperation an hour before, was forgotten. As they cleared the minefields Admiral Doorman set his course north-west, his speed at twenty-five knots.

The best account of the first stages of this great-hearted action comes from the *Kortenaer*. She herself could make twenty-five knots and no more, for one of her boilers was out of action. Lieutenant Jonkheer J. N. van Heurn, who tells her story, says of that speed, "This was enough for fighting, but definitely not enough for running away, which actually did not come into our plans, anyway."

They made contact with the enemy at 4 p.m. *De Ruyter*, in the van, sighted them first, and they heard the short-wave radio say : "Many ships two points on starboard bow." On the *Kortenaer* they had the loud-speaker on maximum volume, and the voice repeating this roared through the ship. This squadron alone was in numbers twice as strong as the Allied force ; the relative strength of its ships was considerably stronger ; there was a heavy over-lap in 8-inch cruisers. And it was not the only Japanese squadron—away to the westward there was certainly one other, possibly more.

On that hot afternoon the odds were hopeless, and they were odds that the men of the Allied squadron had known they must inevitably face. But even as they had forgotten the weariness of days of brutal action, so now they forgot everything save courage. In the full brilliance of the tropic afternoon they raced into action.

Kortenaer was on the disengaged side at 4.14 p.m. as *De Ruyter* opened at a range of 25,000 yards. Her light guns could not make the range ; she could only watch the duel develop between the heavy ships. The formation was : *Jupiter*, *Electra* and *Encounter*, then the cruisers in line ahead led by *De Ruyter*, with *Exeter* following, *Houston* (she could only use her two forward turrets owing to bomb damage), *Perth* and *Java* ; the two Dutch destroyers on the port side two miles distant, and the American destroyers *Edwards*, *Alden*, *Ford* and *Paul Jones* astern.

At once the cruisers came under heavy fire. They could see salvos of nine, twelve, fifteen simultaneous shell-bursts which gave them information as to the class of Japanese ships against them, the last clearly being from a Japanese cruiser of the "Mogami" class. There were at least two 10,000-ton cruisers of the "Nati" class, six 8,500-ton ships, and at least thirteen, and probably more, destroyers. It was evident that the heaviest cruisers of the Japanese Navy were in that line of hummocks on the horizon.

Yet the first round of the battle went to the Allies. Within a very few minutes of the opening the enemy was putting out smoke screens to confuse the fire control of the Allies. In doing so his own onslaught slackened. On the Allied cruisers they changed targets as the smoke obscured their first vessels—there were many other targets.

De Ruyter and *Exeter*, in the van, took the brunt of the onslaught. Time and again they disappeared behind the smothering uprush of shell-fountains. Time and again they roared out through the white brilliance of the spray, their guns firing, the brown smoke whipping back with the swiftness of their movement.

From the enemy's line the first flotilla of Japanese destroyers was flung into an attack. Though from the Allied destroyers on the far side of the line it was impossible to observe this attack, it was beaten off by the cruisers themselves, at least one Japanese destroyer being hit. From the *Kortenaer* they saw a great pillar of smoke go up and mushroom in the clear air.

Immediately after, *De Ruyter* altered course through ninety degrees towards the enemy to shorten the range and to avoid possible torpedoes. It was a gesture of audacious courage, of an ardour fanned by this first success. And it is tragic that immediately after the Allied squadron suffered in its turn. At 5.10 p.m. *Exeter* was hit. Heavy clouds of smoke and steam belched up from her funnels as a shell severed the steam lines in a boiler-room. She lost speed instantly, swerved out of line to port and opened the range. The ships astern of her conformed, *De Ruyter* last. The attack, however, was not broken off thereby.

There was further evidence of torpedo attacks. Heavy explosions that did not come from shells showed in the water, but no ships were hit. Since the range was so great that the enemy destroyers were not even visible from the big ships now, it was clear that this was not surface attack. Apparently the Japanese had planned a line of submarines in advance of their main force. Now as the squadron turned away, fresh disaster came.

A torpedo just scraped the stern of the *Witte de With*, the first Dutch destroyer in the line. The wakes of other torpedoes were seen from several ships. At 5.20 p.m. *Kortenaer* was hit. She was turning at speed, heeled right over under the force of the movement. The torpedo tore her apart in one colossal blow. Lieutenant van Heurn tells how he felt the ship break under him, the tearing of the metal vibrating through his hands as he clung to the steel of the weather-dodger. The lookout in the crow's-nest was flung from his perch like a stone from a sling. The two halves of the broken ship stood vertical a little distance from each other in the water, while her men struggled in the reeking oil pool that surrounded them.

Even then somehow they preserved their humour. Lieutenant van

Hearn describes the doctor perched on the round of the stern thirty feet above the water with the smoke-screen apparatus, jerked into life in the disaster, roaring, so that he was "sitting like some fire-god on his altar, with the thick pillar of smoke towering behind him."

This happened in fifteen seconds.

Beyond them the battle roared on. The Japanese had turned towards the east. Admiral Doorman rectified his line and fought on parallel courses. Enemy planes hovered in the sky about the ships, spotting for the Japanese. The Allies had no air support at all. But even with their air-spotters, who came into operation at 4.22 p.m., it had taken an hour for the first Japanese hit to be secured. From the sinking *Kortenaer* they heard the firing recede in the distance. Rapidly they lost view of the last ships of the line, and there was left only a brown smoke on the horizon, and the thud and thunder of the guns.

About fifteen minutes after the sinking of the *Kortenaer* a second Japanese flotilla attack was thrown in. Against this Admiral Doorman ordered his destroyers to attack. The *Witte de With* was standing by the *Exeter* in obedience to earlier instructions. There were left the British destroyers *Jupiter*, *Electra* and *Encounter*. The Americans were too far astern and too slow for this attack.

The three British destroyers raced into the smoke screen that the Japanese had laid, and lost touch with each other. *Electra* cleared the smoke and sighted three heavy enemy destroyers on opposite courses at 6,000 yards. She immediately engaged and claimed hits with four salvos on the leading ship. In a battle of breathless moments she was hit herself in the boiler-room. She lost steam, listed to port, and slipped away slowly till she stopped. The enemy destroyers disappeared in the smoke. While she lay disabled a single enemy destroyer came through and attacked her. She engaged and hit the Japanese with her second salvo; but, helpless and unable to move, she was pounded to pieces. One by one her guns were silenced: heavy fire broke out for'ard and the list increased. The enemy closed in, using pom-poms in addition to her main armament. Finally the *Electra* listed heavily to port and went down by the bows at 6 p.m.

There is a strange, dramatic sidelight on this phase. The *Kortenaer's* survivors in the water about this time sighted a division of eight destroyers steaming in line ahead "as though for a naval review." Close to the little group of men in the water they turned, apparently to fire on them. And in that instant *Kortenaer's* men heard deafening blows and felt through the water violent shocks. Two destroyers broke up—even as *Kortenaer* had broken up—and disappeared. The remainder steamed out of sight; and as the sun sank, the little group of men felt a strange silence close over them. The battle now had passed even beyond earshot.

At 6.6 p.m. it appeared that another enemy torpedo attack was imminent. Admiral Doorman ordered a further counter-attack, but as the enemy destroyers altered course, cancelled the order. Then at 6.16 he determined to break off the engagement in an attempt to get round to the eastward of the enemy and locate his transport fleet. He made the signal: "Cover my disengagement." The U.S. "tin can" destroyers, up in the line now, raced across the track of the retiring cruisers and fired torpedoes. They made two runs, one from starboard, one from port, and the last torpedoes were fired at 6.27. It is believed that hits were obtained in this phase of the action, as heavy columns of smoke were observed spiralling above the sea where the enemy battle fleet had been.

In the Chief-of-Staff's office at Bandung (W. Java) they waited anxiously upon the flickering wireless. About this time Admiral Doorman called, asking urgently for news of the enemy's convoy. To destroy that convoy was his main objective. Only by its destruction could we hope for time for the salvation of Java. Unless its ships could be battered, fired, sunk, there was no hope for the richest island of the East. They could not give him news and he circled south, then west, then north again, crossing the enemy's track astern of him, in the hope of finding the transport force uncovered. One of the tragedies of the Battle of Java is the failure of air reconnaissance. Throughout the preliminary movements and during the battle itself air co-operation failed the sea. The tremendous losses which the Allies had suffered in the weeks preceding the fight, the establishment by the Japanese of air superiority over most of the area, came in in this critical moment to bar the way even to a local success.

Yet this first phase of the battle was not a defeat. Though even now it is impossible to be certain of the precise loss to the enemy, there is no doubt that the Japanese had suffered more heavily than had the Allied force. Up to the turn at 6.16 we had lost *Exeter* from the line with shell-fire damage; *Kortenaer* and *Electra* were sunk; *De Ruyter* had had a single hit from an 8-inch shell; and *Perth* and the other ships had sustained damage in varying degrees. It seemed certain that, on the other hand, three Japanese destroyers were sunk—two of them were seen to go down by the *Kortenaer's* people—and at least three others were heavily damaged; while, when the Japanese ships turned away to avoid torpedo attack from the American destroyers, one 8-inch cruiser of the "Nati" class was seen to be heavily on fire, and observers on H.M.A.S. *Perth* stated that one 8-inch cruiser had been sunk as well.

Admiral Doorman turned again when to the northward he could find no sign of the troopships. The light had almost gone, and with his small and crippled force he had still to cover the whole north coast of the island. He swung southward to close the shores of Java, for

by now it was certain that the invasion forces must be sweeping down to the coast, and even in the last minute of the eleventh hour he might still catch them off the beaches.

But the Japanese Navy in overwhelming strength was everywhere upon those narrow seas. *Exeter* and *Witte de With*, heading down for Surabaya, had earlier fallen in with six Japanese destroyers. *Witte de With* had already suffered slight damage, her wireless aerials were torn away. *Exeter* was limping, crippled with six of her eight boilers out of action. The Japanese swung in instantly to the attack. In a brisk little action *Exeter* claims one destroyer sunk and *Witte de With* another. They suffered no severe damage themselves, and reached Surabaya safely.

A little later Admiral Doorman, in the brilliant moonlight, sighted four ships to the westward and engaged them. It was not possible to get past them to the north owing to their high speed, and he turned south again and then west to sweep the inshore waters along the Java coast. He closed the coast somewhere west of Surabaya, and, moving still west, searched desperately for signs of the enemy.

At 9.30 p.m. *Jupiter*, almost the last of his big destroyers, was hit by a torpedo amidships. She listed to port and sank slowly. Some of her survivors reached the shore in Carley floats. There was nothing on the inshore water, no sign of troopship or fighting ship upon the surface. *Jupiter* had been struck down by one of the well-handled Japanese submarines.

Off Rembang Admiral Doorman opened the coast again and headed to the north. His position now was almost impossible. The night was treacherous with the deceptive light of a tropic moon. He knew that heavy enemy forces were scattered everywhere about the waters. With his four cruisers, all of them damaged in some degree either in a previous action or in the battle of this day, he had to fight off the weight of half the Japanese Navy. He had virtually no screen. *Encounter* was the only modern destroyer left him, and she was now compelled to ask permission to return to Surabaya to refuel. She was down to her last tons of oil, her fuel endurance exhausted by the high-speed steaming of the day and by the long sweeps which had preceded it.

The four cruisers went on alone. Strangely enough, at the beginning of this last stage of the battle the survivors of the *Kortenaer* came into the picture once again, for through them steamed the remains of the Allied Fleet.

It was an unforgettable sight, those beautiful cruisers at full speed, glittering with the silvery light of the moon. They were coming straight at us, and nearly passed over our heads. The rafts turned over and over, but even all the sea water we swallowed could not drown our cries. We saw people walking on deck. They went by at such close range that the first three sped past us on one side and the *Java* on the other.

The *Houston* threw out a life-belt with a Holmes light attached. This flare saved the lives of the *Kortenaer's* men, for *Encounter*, coming past in turn on her way to Surabaya, sighted the flare, came up—her guns manned in case this was a Japanese trap—and picked up the survivors.

Twelve miles north of Rembang at 11.30 p.m. Admiral Doorman sighted two heavy enemy cruisers. He engaged immediately, and hits were seen.

It was the last roll of the drums before the final tragic crescendo. This was the last hour of the Netherlands Navy of the East, and that hour was fast drawing through its last minutes to the end.

For fifteen minutes a brisk action continued. Hits were observed along the Japanese lines. In the thrust and counter of the fight the Allied squadron was acquitting itself with that same desperate magnificence that had clothed its effort since the first gun-shot of the afternoon.

Close on twelve o'clock Admiral Doorman turned at ninety degrees from the enemy. Almost certainly, from the accounts of the handful of survivors, he turned because of suspected torpedo attack. They were by this time in full view of Bawean Island, well to the northward of Surabaya. And as they turned, *Java*, rear ship of the line, was hit on the port side by a torpedo. The turn was that swift fraction of a second too late. She burst into flames. Instantly afterwards *De Ruyter* was hit. Both ships were still firing their guns in the moment of their ending. Flames ran along their decks. The 40-mm. shells of the ready-ammunition supply stacked on the decks astern, began to explode, showering the ships with fragments.

At midnight they sank—midnight of February 27th, the sombre Friday of the East. So in this last minute of that black day the Dutch Navy of the East ended in glory. Admiral Doorman had fought until his ship sank under him—no man could do more.

Houston and *Perth*, both damaged, broke off the action and returned to Tanjong Priok. And through the night and through the next day the work of rescuing the survivors went on. An American submarine picked up the signalman from Admiral Doorman's flagship; a hospital ship is said to have picked up a hundred and thirty-seven other survivors; another American submarine picked up fifty-four men from the *Electra*. The Japanese picked up eventually a handful of men from one ship and another, including Lieutenant-Commander Thew, the captain of the *Jupiter*.

The battle was over, the Dutch Navy was lost; the command of that last desperate threshold of the sea was lost, and Java was lost with it.

VI

De Ruyter, *Java* and *Exeter* were gone. Two out of the scanty force of destroyers were gone with them. *Perth* was damaged; *Houston* had been hit, and it was clear that the enemy was in strength everywhere across the area of sea involved in the plan of his tremendous landings. The Japanese Admiral had obeyed the first precept of sea power—he had attacked at maximum strength. The little Allied force, without heavy ships for support, desperately poor even in medium ships, had had little chance from the outset.

If, however, assisted by rain squalls, which used to be frequent during this wet season, Admiral Doorman could have got his ships in amongst the invasion fleets, there would have been such a holocaust as even the sea has never known. It might have been a holocaust that would have saved Java. Japan, in the enormous confidence of her sea and air supremacy in the tangled coral seas, had put upon the water between nine and ten divisions of men. A single cruiser running wild through the monstrous armada of coasters, small passenger vessels, deep-sea freighters, liners and store ships of every kind and shape and description, might have saved Java.

Risk is the inevitable concomitant of naval war. The ability to face risk courageously is the hallmark of the leaders of the sea. Admiral Doorman went into that fight in the full knowledge of the power of Japan within his area. He knew the strength of the then unbroken ranks of the Japanese 8-inch cruisers; he knew the weight of her submarine strength. He knew—none could have known better—the balance of the odds. And against those odds he flung himself with an impetuosity, a stark courage, that set him in line with those great Admirals of the Channel—with Tromp and the great De Ruyter from whom his flagship took her splendid name.

He failed. But there is nothing of shame in that failure. The Battle of Java was lost early in that day of disaster, but the great name of the Netherlands Navy survived its ultimate shocks. A page of gallantry and heroism is new-written on the Netherlands roll of fame.

It might be argued that it would have been better to retain these valuable ships to fight upon another day. Obviously it could have been done—no one knew that better than Admiral Helfrich and his assistants Admiral Palliser, R.N., and Admiral Glassford, U.S.N. Their decision was that Admiral Doorman's squadron was to stay in the narrow seas until the bitter end. They hoped to gain time by that sacrifice—time to build up the necessary strength to check the Japanese advance. Even if that strength was not to be built up in Java, time was necessary for it to be built up in India and Australia. The longer the Striking Force could hold out in the Java Sea, the longer would disproportionate Japanese forces be tied there and prevented from

undertaking operations either in the Indian Ocean or in the Coral Sea. Something of the subsequent history of those operations—the failure of the attack upon Ceylon and the defeat of the Japanese in the Coral Sea—must be placed to the account of Admiral Helfrich and his men.

With the loss of the big ships the battle was broken off. *Houston* and *Perth*, alone left in the line, both of them damaged, lost contact with the enemy. Lack of fuel had already robbed them of their destroyer screen. They were short of ammunition. There was no option but for them to retire. The Java Sea was, from this moment, a Japanese lake.

And there was now the problem of extricating from it the remnants of the Allied forces—Dutch, American and British—that remained. Java is six hundred miles long. The Sunda Straits to the westward were the main exit. At their narrowest point they are fourteen miles—two-thirds of the width of the Channel at Dover. Bali Strait to the eastward, the only other door, is a mile wide at its narrowest point. Through those doorways had to pass the crippled *Exeter*, *Houston*, *Perth*, the destroyers *Evertsen*, *Encounter*, *Pope*, *Stronghold*, the sloop *Yarra*, and a number of small craft of one type and another.

Already, even as the battle ended, that migration was begun and the first ships passed in safety, while astern of them overwhelming Japanese forces raced up to close the gates. *Perth* and *Houston* reached Tanjong Priok early on the morning of Saturday, February 28th. With the first of the darkness of that night they left to run the gauntlet of the Straits of Sunda.

At 11.30 p.m. H.M.A.S. *Perth* made an enemy report. Thereafter there was silence. In the hot darkness of the night they went into action, their men exhausted, their ammunition supplies low, their ships damaged—and in that hot darkness they sank.

That same night *Exeter*, steaming at half speed, the best she could make with her crippled boilers, left Surabaya at the far end of Java accompanied by H.M.S. *Encounter* and the U.S. destroyer *Pope*. In the forenoon of Sunday, March 1st, she reported sighting three enemy cruisers steering towards her. No further signals were received from that little force.

When the *Evertsen* attempted the Sunda Straits the Japanese had already established the block. Single-handed she fought two cruisers until, on fire, making water badly, her guns out of action, she was run ashore on the reefs of Sebutu Island (Sunda Strait). Only the four American destroyers managed to escape through Bali Strait.

The Battle of the Java Seas was over.

Meanwhile, all along the north coast of the beleaguered island, the Japanese were breaking in, and in the harbours there and on the south coast the final work—that desperate work that has been carried out

so drastically and so brilliantly through all the East Indies, the work of the scorched earth—was in progress. In Surabaya the floating docks and the dry docks that were the pride of the Netherlands Navy in the East were sunk or blown up. Fire squads and demolition experts wrecked workshops and naval buildings, burned warehouses, destroyed everything afloat in the harbour, sank merchantmen that had not been able to get away, destroyed the remnants of the motor torpedo-boat fleet, and made the base useless to the Japanese.

Cheribon, Serang, Tanjong Priok in their turn were wrecked. And from the harbours the last of the small craft got away—the last of the submarines. Five of the submarines that were left made their passages in safety. From Surabaya the last ship slipped out as the oil tanks went blazing to the sky. Choosing the six-mile strait between Lombok and Sumbawa, away to the eastward, instead of the certain perils of the Straits of Bali, the ship disguised with foliage and green stuff, they raced the rising moon through Lombok Strait and won to safety.

A submarine waited in the harbour until the Japanese were actually entering the city. Harried by enemy destroyers, depth charged and hunted, she too escaped.

And even as she left Surabaya from about the coasts there was beginning the first of that long series of escapes in native proahs, in motor-boats, in junks and native craft that was to go on for weeks, while the determination of the Dutch overcame the intolerable disasters of the island war.

The last of all to leave, apart from these, were naval demolition parties from the little ports of the south coast. In a tiny inter-island freighter one of these parties left, and as their little ship dropped the great heights of the mountains astern of them, she picked up a message from the Java wireless station: "We are now shutting down. Long live our Queen! Good-bye till better times."

The epic of the islands was over.

CHAPTER IV

I

THE Battle of Java saw the end not of the Dutch Navy, but of a phase in its history—the phase of the Far Eastern Squadrons of the Royal Netherlands Navy.

The loss of the bulk of the cruisers at Java, added to that of ships lost and damaged in the early stages of that prolonged and heroic struggle, broke the Netherlands Navy of the Far East as an independent fighting force. But it did not destroy it. Many of the submarines—by the fall of Java they had accounted for a hundred thousand tons of Japanese merchant shipping and troopships and three Japanese

warships—reached Ceylon and Australia. It was reported at one time that one flotilla alone numbered six. Minesweepers, minelayers and other craft reached safety also : reached the safety of a port where they could rest their crews, prepare for sea, take in ammunition—and begin the fight once more.

Almost at once the brisk little paragraphs began to come through again—Dutch submarines operating off New Guinea, off Borneo, off a hundred of the islands of the archipelagoes ; tramping again their old familiar routes, and sinking transports and store ships, tankers and destroyers.

Gradually about the enormous sea-frontier of the Japanese conquest the Allied navies consolidated. The Indian Ocean stood for a while in dire peril ; but under Admiral Somerville a fleet was hastily brought into being in that area. From England the *Isaac Sweers* had been sent hot-foot to the East to join the Far Eastern squadrons. Before she could reach there the Battle of Java had been lost. There was no longer a Dutch East Indian Fleet. She was posted to Admiral Somerville's force, and in the days when the fate of the Indian Ocean hung in a desperate balance, she moved with the British ships.

To the Japanese it must have seemed a "phantom fleet"—but it was enough. After one attack on Ceylon in which the aircraft of the attacking force were completely wiped out, and one air attack on the British ships at sea in which the aircraft-carrier *Hermes* and the cruisers *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* were lost, the Japanese Navy withdrew from the Indian Ocean, and the first check was placed upon the illimitable ambitions of Japan.

Gradually the ring about the conquest was consolidated, and in that consolidation the remnants of the Eastern Fleet played their part. The final blow to Japanese strategy as far as the Indian Ocean was concerned was the seizure by a British expeditionary force of the great French island of Madagascar. The Dutch cruiser *Heemskerk* with other ships formed part of the escort force and took her share in the brief campaign that established the British units necessary for the conquest of the island. It was the *Heemskerk* that later, with Australian cruisers, cut off and sank a German blockade runner in the Indian Ocean. The ring was complete.

II

Meanwhile on the Home Front, the coastwise waters of Europe, the re-created Home divisions worked endlessly without advertisements, without *réclame* : the gun-boats covered the ceaseless convoys ; the sweepers took up with each dawn the new and unceasing search ; the light craft and motor gun-boats, the M.L.s and motor torpedo-boats took their never-ending part as the battle of the Channel rose



Dutch torpedo boats of the Channel Flotillas at speed.



Dutch submarine sinking an enemy schooner in Mediterranean waters.

through the summer of 1942 to incredible heights of audacity and courage.

This battle of the Channel was international in every possible sense. The four Free Navies and the British shared alike in its audacious forays. They worked from communal bases. A division might contain Pole, Fighting Frenchman, Norwegian, British as well as Dutch.

A single example will serve. In August of 1942 a patrol of light coastal craft under the command of Lieutenant G. D. K. Richards, R.N., and including one vessel manned by the Royal Netherlands Navy and one of the Polish Navy, intercepted a force of enemy minesweepers heading in for Calais harbour. Despite assistance from the shore in the shape of searchlights and the fire of coastal batteries, the patrol got across the bows of the enemy, engaged them at close range and inflicted very considerable damage on them, this within less than hailing distance of the Calais beaches. One of the ships of the patrol was hit by tracer bullets, which set fire to some stores, but the First Lieutenant jettisoned these, and the fire failed to take hold. The enemy, in spite of every advantage of assistance and proximity to his own base, broke off the engagement and raced for the safety of Calais harbour.

At the same time a second patrol, under the command of Lieutenant G. L. Cotton, R.N.V.R., and again including a unit of the Royal Netherlands Navy, sighted an enemy tanker farther down the coast heavily screened by armed trawlers and a large number of U-boats. As the patrol pressed home its attack, the enemy opened a very heavy fire. One boat was hit and her Commanding Officer wounded, but despite this she continued to close the enemy and scored a torpedo hit on the tanker. She was engaged by a large number of E-boats immediately after, silenced the guns of four of them, but received so much damage that she herself lay stopped in the searchlights of the enemy, and was heavily shelled. Despite this hasty repairs were effected, and she got safely home.

Meanwhile the Royal Netherlands Navy boat, closing the target under a vicious hail of fire from the thoroughly awakened enemy, broke through the gap in the escort screen, and fired her torpedo from close range, the tanker towering above them even as the fish ran clear. A huge column of water was thrown up against the vessel's side as the Dutch boat passed close under her stern and got away.

Bluntly and briefly, that is a typical story of the Channel sweeps. It says nothing of the tumultuous excitement of those swift actions, nothing of the tenacity and courage of the men who carry them out. Some of the finest deeds of this war have been accomplished by the Channel flotillas, and in that honour the Free Navies have their abundant share.

III

The *Isaac Sweers* had come back from the Indian Ocean. In the Far East she had been replaced by the destroyer *Tjerk Hiddes*. Built at Clydeside for the Royal Navy, she had been taken over by the Dutch to replace something of the loss of the *Java Sea*. The Netherlands Navy needed ships badly. To Australia had come survivors from the earlier battles, a handful from the disaster of the *Java Sea* itself, men from the ports and the training establishments. In England were men of the constant escapes. It was easy enough to man the *Tjerk Hiddes*.

In November of 1942 every ship that could float in Atlantic waters was needed to cover the vast amphibious operation that was to take North Africa from Vichy, from Italy and from Germany. The *Isaac Sweers* left England again to cover a convoy down to Gibraltar. She left Gibraltar and picked up another convoy off the Azores, brought it in, went out to pick up survivors from a ship torpedoed sixty miles from the Rock, and finally sailed from Gibraltar to rejoin the rest of her flotilla in the Mediterranean.

The night after she had left the Rock, while she was working with British destroyers in a sweep for U-boats, she was torpedoed. Two explosions occurred almost simultaneously, one on the bow and one on the starboard quarter. The ship caught fire immediately, and ready ammunition on the decks began to explode. The after part of the ship was cut off almost at once, and as her people took to the water she was blazing furiously. Eighty-two officers and men of her crew of two hundred and twenty were picked up by a British destroyer, many of them terribly burnt, and brought into Gibraltar. They said that as they swam from the wreck they could see the ship's number always illuminated as if at a review. They said too that the ship's whistle began to scream just before she sank and continued in a terrible wail as she went down. This was the heaviest loss that the Netherlands Navy had suffered since the *Java* battle.

But even as the *Isaac Sweers*, that symbol of the renaissance of the Dutch Navy, was sinking in the cold water of the winter Mediterranean, the *Tjerk Hiddes*—half-way across the world—was establishing a new reputation in the Timor Sea. On the little island of Timor, seized by the Allies from the Portuguese in a vain attempt to hold it as a bulwark against the Japanese, there was still fighting. The Dutch and British troops that had first taken possession of the island had held out all this while against the Japanese in the rugged hinterland of Timor. The Japanese held the ports, but an indomitable spirit possessed these men. There was nothing left to fight for in the island, yet they fought on; and in December of 1942 it was decided to bring away those who had survived bullets and bombing, starvation,

exposure and jungle fever. In three trips which stand high among the gallant adventures of the war, the *Tjerk Hiddes* went into Timor and brought them off.

IV

On the first day of June of 1940 the Dutch Naval Air Service had formed in England a naval air squadron to operate with the R.A.F. in Coastal Command. Its personnel had flown to England in the old Fokker 'planes with which they had been equipped before the war. In England they switched first to Avro Ansons, then to the American-built Hudsons, to-day they operate with Mitchells. It is not within the limits of this book to describe their work in detail, but from the 20th August, 1941—when they sank their first enemy ship off the coast of Norway—the men of this squadron have achieved an amazing record. By the end of 1942 they had accounted for a hundred thousand tons of enemy shipping, ranging from a transport of 8,000 tons to flak ships. Their first seven successes were off the coast of Norway. From there they transferred to their own coast—the coast of Holland. In their first month of operations off the Netherlands' coast they sank twelve ships totalling thirty-eight thousand tons.

In April of 1942 Queen Wilhelmina decorated the standard of the Royal Dutch Naval Air Service with the Militaire Willemsorde—the Dutch Victoria Cross. It has been earned. And in August of 1943 the Royal Dutch Naval Air Service bombed their own country. Their target was a big aircraft frame factory at Flushing which makes frames for Dornier bombers. There was grimness about this attack. To an Intelligence Officer, in reply to the question "How did you recognise the target?" the navigator of one 'plane said, "I lived there for some time: my family doesn't live there now."

Mostly, however, work in this squadron has been in strokes against enemy shipping. The loss to Germany as a result of a combination of air, motor torpedo-boat and M.G.B. attack against her convoys all along the seaboard from the Skaw to Cherbourg has played a tremendous part in the increasing weakening of her Continental strength. To these "beggars of the air" goes a heavy share in that destruction.

V

The Dutch Navy is small still, yet in these last months it has made its weight felt in the Pacific, in the Indian Ocean, in the Atlantic and the North Sea, and always in the Mediterranean.

In November of 1942 the submarine *Dolfijn*—one of the small, extraordinarily efficient type which has done such excellent work with the British flotillas—was commissioned. She embodied a number

of improvements at the request of the Dutch, and as soon as she had worked up she was sent to the Mediterranean. In February of 1943, almost as she arrived in the inland sea, she torpedoed and sank an Italian submarine—thus equalling the feat of Lieutenant-Commander van Dulm in 1941. Since that day, and until the collapse of Italy, she maintained an average of an enemy ship a month.

Dolfijn was followed to the Mediterranean by two vastly different ships—the little gunboats *Soemba* and *Flores*. Shallow-draught ships of 1,500 tons, they were built in 1925. They carry three 5.9-inch guns. When the operations against Sicily were decided upon it was obvious that close support from shallow-draught ships would be of extreme value, and *Soemba* and *Flores* were selected to work with the landing parties and to give covering fire to forces working along the beaches or on the slopes of the hills which fringe a great part of the Sicilian coast. In that task they have earned the unqualified admiration not only of the British Navy but of the men of the army as well. They have taken part in almost every one of the principal amphibious operations along both the Sicilian eastern shore and the Italian "toe." One officer described them as "scurrying up and down like terriers after a rat leaving long trails of cordite cases bobbing in their wakes."

Soemba began with the escort of a convoy to the island, and, while the troops landed, engaged shore batteries and forced the surrender of one of them. Even as the Italians were coming down to the beach with a white flag she went into action against enemy tanks and forced their withdrawal. Subsequently she shot down a Messerschmitt. *Flores* was damaged by a near miss but, overnight, effected temporary repairs and at dawn was in action again. At the end of the campaign her "score sheet" read: thirteen bombardments of enemy areas, twelve times under fire from enemy shore batteries, thirty-one air attacks fought off, one U-boat sunk in collaboration with British destroyers.

On more than one occasion they went into action together. At a point near Catania the enemy had eight gun positions elaborately prepared on high ground commanding our advance. Troop movements were constantly held up by the fire of these batteries, and it was difficult to bring counter-battery fire from the land against them. *Soemba* and *Flores* went in almost up to the beach with their guns blazing. Though they were drenched at times in the spray of shell splashes, though they were almost under the whistling chorus of fire from the shore, they knocked out three of the batteries by direct hits and, ringing the others with close and accurate groups, made them untenable. When the Eighth Army advanced under cover of their fire the batteries were deserted, their areas pock-marked with shell-bursts, battered and broken.

They suffered loss from time to time, men wounded by splinters.

The commanding officer of *Soemba*, Commander J. J. M. Steckenberg, was killed on his bridge. They were bombed, they were strafed from the air, they were harassed in every possible way—and they went on. Sicily ended and they crossed the narrow waterways to Italy always on the flank of the army, always in action.

That might be taken for the motto of the new navy of the Netherlands—"Always in Action."

FRANCE

CHAPTER I

I

THERE are many dates in the beginning of the collapse of France. Some men place it as far back as the days when self-interest and political corruption first entered into the "two hundred families" that have symbolised the wealth of the country. Some men date it from the black Thursday of May 16th, when the Germans crossed the Meuse and at Mézières flung their panzer divisions through the lines of the French Army. Some date it from that blacker Thursday of June 13th, when it was decided that Paris should not be defended, and all central France was thereby laid open to the thrust of Germany. Some place it on the day of June 22nd, when the ancient Marshal accepted Hitler's terms and signed an armistice that ensured the occupation of two-thirds of France at French cost by German troops, that demobilised the French Army, that handed over all the forts and military equipment, that released all German prisoners and left all French prisoners still in German hands, and that disarmed the French Fleet in French ports. The day that Marshal Pétain said, as he signed, "Honour has been saved. Our Government remains free. France will be governed only by Frenchmen."

On Saturday, June 23rd, General de Gaulle issued the proclamation that gave to the world the news of the formation of the Provisional French National Committee to continue the struggle. If the dates of the collapse of France are uncertain, the date of its regeneration is assured.

The French Navy was in a position of curious difficulty. The ships of the northern ports—Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne, Dieppe—mostly little ships these—had fallen back, some of them to English harbours, some of them to the west French ports, as the tide of invasion flooded down the coast of France. The ships of the western ports, as that tide rolled yet farther, were ordered to move to the great British naval bases. The ships of the southern harbours—the Mediterranean fleet—moved from Toulon, Marseilles and Villefranche to the North African harbours—Oran, Algiers and Bizerta.

That at least was the intention: but even in the earliest hours of the collapse there were signs of a terrible disunity amongst the men of the French Navy. Some ships from the western ports refused to sail to Britain. The great unfinished battleship *Jean Bart*, ordered to proceed to Portland, came down the river from St. Nazaire, steamed past the tug that was sent to assist her on her passage, and headed

south-west for Casablanca. The *Richelieu*, largest and most modern of the French battleships, went to Dakar. The aircraft-carrier *Béarn*, at sea with a cargo of a hundred American aircraft for France, turned back to Martinique, and was joined there by the training cruiser *Jeanne d'Arc*, together with small craft and submarines which had been working in that area.

By the time the tangled, complex and sometimes incredible manœuvrings of the Fleet were complete, the disposition was approximately thus. In the harbours of Great Britain there were two battleships, the *Paris* and the *Courbet*, ships of 22,000 tons, carrying twelve 12-inch guns. They were built in 1913/14, and were reconstructed in 1928/9. Their value in the line of battle was doubtful. There were two light cruisers, the large submarine *Surcouf* and some smaller ones, eight destroyers, and close on two hundred small ships: anti-submarine craft—*chasseurs*—minesweepers, patrol boats and small minelayers.

In Alexandria was the battleship *Lorraine*, completed in 1916 and reconstructed in 1934/5. Though her use in the line of battle was rather greater than that of the "Paris" class, and though she had been used in the bombardment of Italian coast positions in Libya in the early days of the war, she was still elderly according to modern ideas. With her, however, were three heavy cruisers, *Suffren*, *Duquesne* and *Tourville*, ships of 10,000 tons, carrying eight 8-inch guns, capable of a speed of 32.25 knots, and with a complement of six hundred men. They were fast, modern ships—the class was completed in 1931—and had a considerable reputation in the French Navy. With them was the *Duguay-Trouin*, a medium cruiser of 7,300 tons, carrying eight 6-inch guns, and credited with a speed of 34 knots. Completed in 1926, she was one of the best-looking vessels in the French Fleet. With these were a number of destroyers and smaller craft. All these ships were potentially under British control.

At Martinique was France's single aircraft-carrier, the *Béarn*. A redesigned battleship of 22,000 tons, she was completed as an aircraft-carrier in 1927. With her was the *Jeanne d'Arc*, a sea-going cadet ship completed in 1931, of 6,500 tons and carrying eight 6-inch guns. These ships, virtually blockaded in Martinique, were also beyond the possibility of German interference.

A considerable proportion of France's sea strength, therefore, was either available to Britain or was neutralised. But there remained her best ships—the *Richelieu*, of 35,000 tons and mounting eight 15-inch guns, and the *Dunkerque* and the *Strasbourg*, the two battle-cruisers completed in 1936. Ships of 26,500 tons, carrying eight 13-inch guns and with a speed of 30 knots, they were the finest fighting units of the French Navy. More modern than any heavy ship in the British Navy at the outbreak of the war, these three had represented a very important portion of the Allied naval strength. The *Jean*

Bart, second of the "Richelieu" class of three ships of 35,000 tons, was incomplete. She was not capable of steaming at more than seven and a half knots, and had only one turret mounted. With these ships were the *Provence* and *Bretagne* of the "Lorraine" class. There were, therefore, three modern battleships and two old still in French ports, and consequently, in view of the more than dubious attitude of the Bordeaux Government, potentially under the risk of German seizure.

In addition there were the *Dupleix*, *Foch*, *Colbert* and *Algérie* of the heavy cruisers, the 7,000-ton cruisers *Marseillaise*, *Jean de Vienne*, *La Galissonnière*, *Georges Leygues*, *Montcalm* and *Gloire*, the 6,000-ton cruiser *Émile Bertin*, the seaplane-carrier *Commandant Teste*, and a large number of the heavy destroyers in which the French Navy had put so much faith, together with light destroyers—about fifty in all—approximately sixty submarines and a normal proportion of light craft. There were also a number of small ships at Madagascar, in Indo-China and elsewhere in the French Empire.

II

On July 4th Mr. A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty in the British Cabinet, said :

I myself visited Bordeaux a fortnight ago and had interviews with President Lebrun, with Marshal Pétain, M. Baudouin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Admiral Darlan, the creator and the chief of the modern French Navy. I received the most solemn assurances that no armistice would be signed containing terms which placed the French Fleet in danger of being handed over to the enemy for use against the ally of France.

The published terms of the armistice, however, made it quite clear that there was no safeguard against this grave possibility except the word of the leading aggressor and his henchman. As soon as we knew these terms both Admiral Sir Dudley Pound (First Sea Lord) and myself addressed fresh personal appeals to Admiral Darlan in the name of our long friendship and the long personal associations in naval affairs of the two Services. With profound regret we had to admit that these appeals were without result.

As the shock and turmoil of those unhappy days continued, as France under the evil influence of the pro-German forces within her own body politic fell deeper and deeper into the pit that she had dug for herself, it became evident that only the very strongest measures could guarantee to Britain the maintenance of that superiority at sea upon which the continuance of the war, the fate of the British Isles, the very existence of the British Empire, depended.

In the early hours of Wednesday, July 3rd, all French vessels in British ports were boarded by British military and naval parties. Those

shore establishments where French seamen were quartered were placed under guard. And the whole of the French Fleet which had come from the western and northern ports to England passed under direct British control. Taking over the ships was accomplished everywhere without incident except on the giant submarine *Surcouf* where, in a scuffle due to a misunderstanding, Commander D. V. Sprague and one British leading seaman were killed, and one officer and one leading seaman injured. An important step in the denial of the French Fleet to Germany had been taken. Admiral Cayol and Admiral Villaine, commanding the units which had come to Britain, were sent to Oxford on the instructions of the Admiralty to be treated "as honoured guests while awaiting repatriation."

Simultaneously at Alexandria Admiral Godefroy, Commander-in-Chief of the French naval squadron which had up to the armistice been co-operating with the British forces under Admiral Cunningham, was informed that he had the alternative of continuing the fight along side the British Fleet or of demilitarising his ships and putting them into a condition in which they could not go to sea. After protest, and in view of the fact that he was in a foreign harbour in the presence of a greatly superior British force, Admiral Godefroy agreed, and the ships were promptly demilitarised.

In the principal naval bases of Britain—and three thousand five hundred miles away in one of the principal bases of the Mediterranean—a third of the French Navy was secure. There remained still the tremendously powerful units that lay in the North African ports. To neutralise those also was a matter of the most urgent, the most vital military necessity, a necessity which permitted of no shadow of weakness, of no faintest sign of sentiment. The very corporate life of Britain as a nation was, through the pusillanimity, the vacillation, the treachery of the men of Bordeaux (who were to become the men of Vichy) at stake. A combination between the French Fleet, the powerful remaining units of the German Fleet and the strong and modern Italian Fleet would have given the Axis something more than equality. It would have given the British Navy, scattered over the eighty thousand miles of the Empire's seaways, exposed to attack in a hundred vital places along her arteries of communication, an impossible task.

Early on July 3rd, Force H., the British squadron at Gibraltar, approached Oran. It was known that in the military harbour of Mers-el-Kebir on the Moroccan coast were lying the two battle-cruisers *Strasbourg* and *Dunkerque*, and the two old battleships *Provence* and *Bretagne*, together with a number of light cruisers, destroyers and submarines, under the command of the then French Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Gensoul. The British force was under Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville, K.C.B., D.S.O., who was flying his flag in

H.M.S. *Hood*. She was accompanied by the aircraft-carrier *Ark Royal*, together with a number of other ships.

The Force took up position outside Mers-el-Kebir, and Captain C. S. Holland, Commanding Officer of the *Ark Royal*, was selected to make contact with Admiral Gensoul and offer him certain alternatives. Captain Holland was permitted to pass the boom, but Admiral Gensoul declined to receive him on board the *Dunkerque*. Since amicable relations were clearly ruled out from the start, Captain Holland had no alternative but to deliver to French officers a document setting forth the British proposals. These were that the French Fleet should either agree to continue operations with the Royal Navy, or sail under British control to a British port from which the crews would be repatriated on arrival (the ships to be restored at the end of the war), or that Admiral Gensoul should take his forces to the West Indies, where the ships would be demilitarised. The note ended with the stern threat that, should the Admiral decline the offers, the British Government required him to sink his ships where they lay within six hours, failing which the Flag Officer, Force H. had orders to use "whatever force might be necessary."

A study of these proposals convinced Admiral Gensoul of the desirability of a meeting with Captain Holland, and a discussion continued for some hours. No effort was spared to persuade the Admiral to accept. Despite the generosity of the alternatives, Admiral Gensoul declined the proposals *en bloc*.

At 5.53 p.m. Force H. opened fire on the French ships. Fire was returned within five minutes, and what Mr. Churchill described as "this melancholy action" was joined. The battleship *Bretagne* and two destroyers were sunk; the *Dunkerque* was damaged and had to be beached to prevent her sinking; the *Provence* was badly damaged.

But the *Strasbourg*, with a screen of six destroyers, broke out of harbour at dusk, eluded Force H., and made off at full speed to the eastward. She was attacked by Swordfish from *Ark Royal*. Their bombs straddled her, but secured no hits. At 8 a.m. a second striking force of Swordfish was flown off, and sighted the *Strasbourg* steaming at 28 knots. Despite accurate anti-aircraft fire they made their attack, but secured only a single hit.

On the following day a further attack was made on the *Dunkerque*, which was lying on the beach. Four of six torpedoes hit their target.

The first vital surgical operation necessary upon the body of the French Navy was complete.

The second followed. In one of the most daring small-boat actions of the war Lieutenant-Commander Bristowe, R.N., took a motor-boat into Dakar harbour, passed the boom defences, and went alongside the port quarter of the *Richelieu*. He dropped depth charges under

the stern of the warship as she lay at anchor in shallow water, and, despite a breakdown in harbour, effected his escape. While the motor-boat was endeavouring to get out of harbour, her crew watched the Fleet Air Arm carry out a second attack. Five explosions were heard, and a number of torpedo hits were definitely secured on the *Richelieu*.

The French Navy, despite the machinations of the Vichy Government, was "demilitarised." In those three strokes it ceased to be a factor in the calculations of the Axis. The crippling of two of the three modern ships of the line, the damage to the third, the virtual destruction of the last two of the old battleships, made the sea victory of Britain certain.

These are not pleasant memories. There was small glory at Oran. There was only the gallantry of Bristowe and his boat's crew to lighten the sombre page of Dakar. There will be no letters of gold for these actions in the naval annals of Britain. But these things were necessary—they were more than necessary—they were vital to Britain's continued existence as a nation. Of that, after four years of war, there is no shadow of doubt. It is necessary to recount them in this brief history in order that the position of the French Navy as a whole may be properly understood. It is necessary to draw them in as the sombre background, the deep and tenebrous gloom, out of which the Free French Navy grew like a thread of light. That was the night of disaster. The creation of the Free French Navy was like the light of a new morning.

CHAPTER II

I

ON June 28th, 1940, Admiral Muselier, with two warships and three merchantmen, arrived at Gibraltar harbour.

On June 30th Admiral Muselier arrived in London to place himself at the disposal of General de Gaulle.

On July 1st he broadcast an appeal to all men of the French sea and air forces to obey all orders "tending to the good of France and the success of French arms."

Almost as he gave his broadcast the captain of the submarine *Narval* was making his historic signal to the French Fleet: "Treason all around me, I rally at a British port," as he slipped out of the great naval base of Bizerta.

Three thousand miles away, in the North Sea, the captain and crew of the submarine *Rubis* were turning to head for a British port to carry on the fight.

On July 5th a new submarine crew came.

On July 6th a fourth, and more than three hundred seamen, arrived on British soil.

On July 10th four officers left the ships of the French squadron in Alexandria and placed themselves at the disposal of the authorities at a military camp near the Suez Canal. By July 18th their number had grown to fifty.

These things are like bright lights against the blackout of France.

It is not possible to make direct comparison between the formation of the Free French Navy and the reorganisation of the others of the navies-in-exile. The first of the ships of the Polish Navy sailed to England upon the direct orders of their Government and their Admiralty. The ships of Norway followed their gallant King, their Admiralty and their Government to Britain. The major part of the Dutch Navy was far beyond metropolitan waters, and ships of the home bases followed their Queen across the North Sea. The ships of Greece moved with their Government and with their King.

Admiral Muselier, the *Narval*, the *Rubis*, the other ships of the escape, sailed from a country in defeat, a country under the brutal heel of the conqueror, against the instructions of the local commanders, against the wishes of their Admirals, against the absolute and final orders of their Government. The French Fleet was held in pawn by Bordeaux and Vichy. It was considered by Pétain, Admiral Darlan and the men of the French Government, not as a Navy but as a bargaining counter against the rapacity and the greed of the German invader. It was the one heavy weight that could still be placed in the balance against the defeat of France.

These men who came to Britain, sailed not from a foreign invader only, but from their own constituted authority. They sailed not under law—but against law. They sailed leaving their wives and families to the doubtful mercy of a conqueror or at least to the undoubted hostility of their own Government. All these things they must have weighed in their minds before they left the harbours and the coasts of France. They must have weighed the pronouncements and the decrees of Bordeaux, the masochistic appeals of the ancient Pétain. Many of them had, to help their judgment, no more than the distorted, devitalised news of the French Press in the days of the overrunning of France.

We in Britain carried on the fight out of a stubbornness and a refusal to admit defeat that is a part of the British character. That stubbornness is in great part a product of the love of country, a love of Britain. How could that motive influence these men? It is not a thing to wonder at that the first recruits to the Free French Navy were few. It is a thing to stand amazed at that they came at all.

If any man thinks that I place too great a weight upon these imponderables, let him remember this one thing—on 26th October, 1940,

by the verdict of a court martial at Toulon, Admiral Muselier, Commander-in-Chief of the Navy of the Fighting French, was condemned to death by the authorities of his own country.

II

Admiral Muselier on June 10th, 1940, was at Bordeaux in charge of factories working for national defence. When he heard the news of the pending armistice, he drove throughout the night to Paris. Reaching the city, he destroyed secret plans and even secret plant in factories of the capital, as the Nazis were entering the city. From Paris he escaped to Marseilles where, gathering "men of good will," officers and ratings of the French Navy who thought as he did, he took command of a warship and, with another warship and a tiny flotilla of merchantmen, sailed to Gibraltar.

From Gibraltar Admiral Muselier flew to London on June 30th. On a packing-case in the hastily improvised office which served as the headquarters for a renascent France, he wrote out his first appeal to all good Frenchmen. In those bare quarters the scheme of a new French Navy was worked out. There were ships—they ranged from battleships to the little *chasseurs*—but the first, the most difficult of all the problems was to man them. Britain had promised to the men removed from ships in British ports, when on July 3rd she seized those vessels, that they would be repatriated. There were many who chose before the day of repatriation came to throw in their lot with General de Gaulle and Admiral Muselier. There were others. It is possible even to-day to appreciate something of their mental conflict. Though the spirit of Britain in those months of June and July saved the world, there were very many even in Britain who stood facing the enemy in the spirit of a forlorn hope, and in France, with two-thirds of her country garrisoned by Germany and the rest in fee, the time of forlorn hopes was past.

On Wednesday, July 24th, the French merchant ship *Meknes* sailed for France carrying twelve hundred French naval officers and men from the seized ships, who were being repatriated to their homeland under a guarantee of safe conduct from Germany. At 10.45 p.m. off the coast of Brittany the ship, carrying full lights and flying the French flag, on which a searchlight was trained, was hit amidships by a German torpedo. Within ten minutes she had sunk. The survivors were brought back to Britain. At once many of them expressed their wish to join the forces of General de Gaulle. This latest treachery was too much.

As fresh men came in—they were recruited from French fishing vessels that had come across from Normandy and Brittany, men who had escaped in small boats, men who had come back from Dunkirk

and the Channel ports and had not returned in the general repatriation, men from French merchant ships that had cast in their lot with the new French Committee of regeneration—it became necessary to create a training ship. The battleship *Courbet*, lying then in harbour, was the obvious ship, and it was the harbour in which she lay that became the principal base of the Free French movement. And it was from Portsmouth that the first ships went to sea, flying side by side on twin jack-staffs the white ensign and the tricolour.

From those tiny beginnings the Free French Navy grew to a force of fifty ships and six thousand men, the second largest of the navies-in-exile. It became in the early days obvious that the *Courbet* could not alone handle the press of recruits and trainees, and in a little while three ships—the *President Théodore Tissier*, the *Belle Poule* and the *Étoile*—were fitted out as additional training schools, largely for officers. To them were added the destroyer *Bouclier* for specialist work, and the sloop *Amiens*. Eventually a land school was established at a naval barracks for the training of mechanics, electricians, paymasters, secretaries and so forth, and called *Bir Hacheim*. In addition to these separate establishments courses were provided for cadets at Dartmouth, the cradle of Britain's naval officers, and at other naval training establishments. The co-operation of the British Admiralty has been in every particular complete.

The work these improvised training ships have done has been admirable, and to their record as training establishments belongs also the honour of being, I think, the first Free French units to come into action against the enemy. For *Courbet*, and later the other ships in Portsmouth harbour, became in the desperate necessity of the times anti-aircraft batteries as well as schools. On reconnaissance planes, on the first bombers that cruised over Portsmouth at night, in the flaming hours of the great Portsmouth raids, the men of *Courbet* and her sisters fought their ships against the enemy. By the middle of September, at the height of the Battle of Britain, four German planes had been shot down by the *Courbet*. The blue ensign that carries the cross of Lorraine had had its sea baptism of fire.

III

Gradually the names of fighting ships began to creep into the news: *Le Triomphant*, *Surcouf*, *Minerve*, *Commandant Duboc*, *Commandant Dominé*, *Savorgnan de Brazza*—inevitably the *Narval* and the *Rubis*. There were other ships too. Not all of them were manned at once completely by Frenchmen: some went to sea with mixed crews, British and French combining in a manner that was symbolic of the absolute co-operation between this newest of the new navies and the old.

I remember one of these dual-nation ships which called at Gibraltar in the early part of 1941. Her captain, an Englishman, told me that nothing would induce him to apply for a transfer. He had, he told me, the chef of a famous Paris restaurant as his chief cook. "Would you move?" said he.

There were many difficulties to face. Ammunition was one. The calibre of most French naval guns was different from that of English usage. The ships carried only their normal outfit of ammunition when they left their base ports. It is possible for a ship to fire her complete outfit of ammunition in a single day of hot action. More-over spares were almost non-existent. Something could be done by cannibalising—by taking parts from ships that were not to be manned and using them for ships that were in commission, but even that could not solve all the problems of repair and maintenance.

The submarine *Surcouf*, for example, had been under refit at Brest when the rush of the German armies across the plains of France threatened that far-distant harbour. On one motor she cleared the port and reached Britain. In September she was officially included for the first time in the list of Free French naval units. But she was alone of her type—the biggest and most powerful submarine built up to the present. Her armament of two 8-inch guns in a turret alone made her an almost incredible thing amongst submarines. She carried in addition to this a small aircraft for spotting purposes. She had two anti-aircraft guns, and ten torpedo tubes, and she carried a complement of a hundred and fifty men. Her tonnage on the surface was nearly 3,000; submerged it was 4,300 tons. There were no men even as there were no spare parts available to "fit" a mass of that size. Yet, by the determination of Admiral Muselier and his men, by months of patient labour, by masterpieces of improvisation, she was made ready for sea.

That curse of "spares" was to weigh heavily on all the French-built ships of the little navy through the months and the years that were to follow. British destroyers, built in flotillas of a single type, have always "spares" in a shore depot. If a propeller is damaged it can be replaced for, inevitably, in some depot there will be a propeller that fits any ship of the class. Machinery, auxiliary plant, guns and gun parts, fittings of all sorts, are interchangeable, standardised. Many of these can be replaced within a matter of hours at the dockyards of their bases. Often it is a matter of unshipping one part and shipping a replacement by the removal of a few bolts. When a part was worn, damaged by the sea or by enemy action in those French ships, it had to be new-made in dockyards unaccustomed to the type, lacking the specifications, working to a practice other than their own.

None the less the Cross of Lorraine was at sea within a very few weeks of Admiral Muselier's appeal. That appeal had not been fol-

lowed, as the Admiral had hoped, by the allegiance of any substantial portion of the Navy of France. But the spirit of General de Gaulle and of his men remained unfettered. If the Free French Navy was small in those early days, it still carried the Cross to sea.

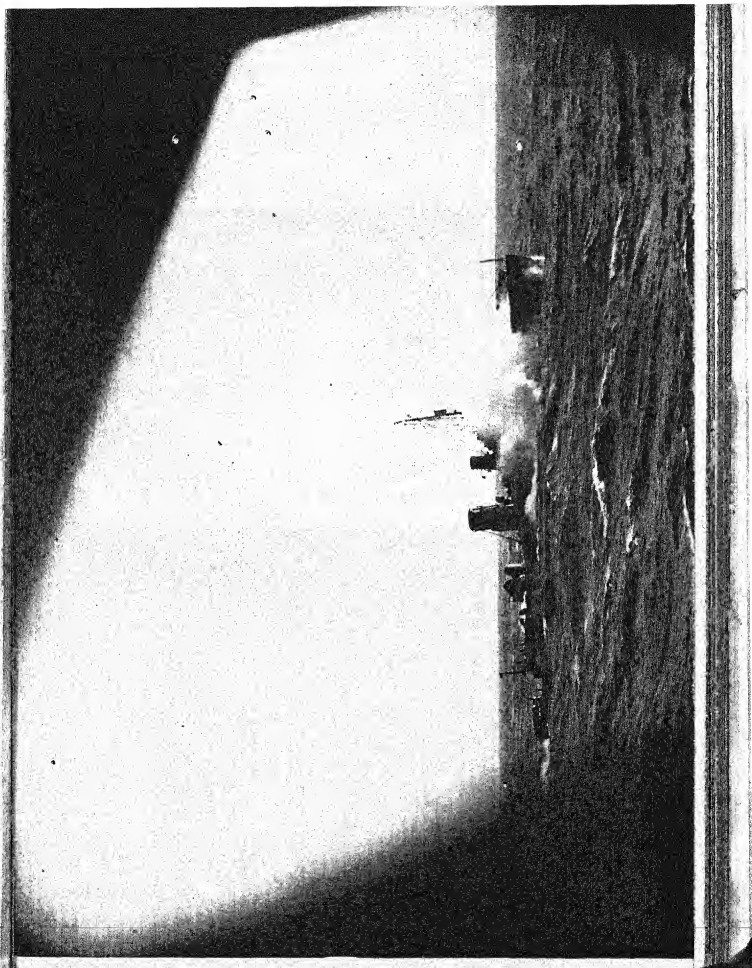
IV

The first important operation in which the Free French Command was engaged began early in September when a convoy of ships, under the command of General de Gaulle, left England with the intention of taking control of Dakar. It was believed, when the expedition was planned, that Dakar was of the same state of mind as French Equatorial Africa, which had declared early on allegiance to de Gaulle and its absolute determination to continue the fight against the Axis.

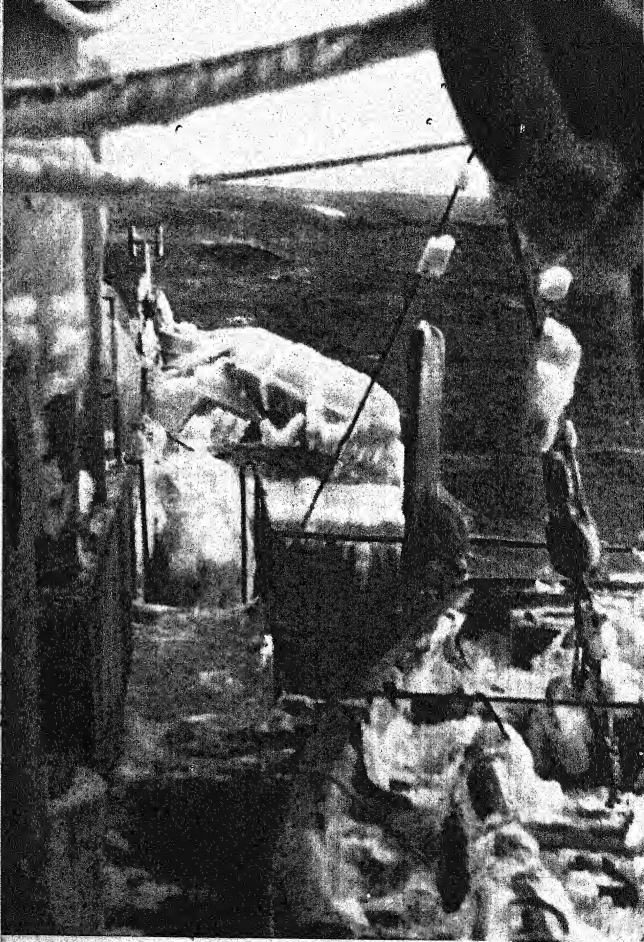
Some of the history of the Dakar expedition is still uncertain. It was throughout complex, difficult and, in the end, painful. Properly it might be said to have started at the end of June, when M. de Boisson was sent by the Vichy Government to Dakar to replace M. Léon Cayla, who was suspect to the men of Vichy. M. Cayla had more than once expressed his disapproval of the manner of France's surrender, and of his desire to carry on the fight. There is no shadow of doubt that a very large proportion of the French inhabitants of this enormously important West African port, situated on one of the vital strategic points of the oceans, thought at one with their deposed Governor. The Vichy Government appreciated the importance of Dakar; so did Germany—of that there is no question.

In the middle of September, with the approval and, it is believed, under certain pressure from the German High Command, the three cruisers *Georges Leygues*, *Montcalm* and *Gloire* (7,600 tons and mounting nine 6-inch guns) and three 2,500-ton destroyers of the "Fantasque" class left Toulon for the Straits of Gibraltar. Though the ships could have been stopped without difficulty by the British squadron based on Gibraltar, political embroilments stood in the way of the British Admirals; and in the uncertainty of our relationships with what was left of France, and in the absence of unequivocal orders from Whitehall, they were permitted to pass. They turned south-west after clearing Cape Spartel, passed Casablanca and headed for Dakar, there to join the damaged *Richelieu* and the small ships which already occupied the harbour.

Subsequently they put out from Dakar, heading south. Ships of the Royal Navy intercepted their passage, according to an official statement issued in London at the time, and insisted on their reversing their course, which they eventually did. Two of them returned to Dakar, and the third, which was suffering from engine trouble, was escorted by one of H.M. ships towards Casablanca.



A corvette of the Free French Navy in heavy weather.



Encased in ice : a Free French corvette in Northern waters.

General de Gaulle with his force, escorted in part by the sloops of the Free French Navy and in part by ships of the Royal Navy, was already at sea, heading south towards Dakar.

On the morning of September 23rd a motor-boat from one of the French warships, flying the white flag, approached the harbour carrying General de Gaulle's plenipotentiaries.

Dakar lies in a deep harbour covered at the entrance by the rocky island of Goree. In the seventeenth century Goree itself—it has been called the Corregidor of West Africa—was notorious as a pirate stronghold. Naturally tremendously strong, it has been fortified since the very early days of the Portuguese voyaging to the East.

As the motor-boat approached the entrance to the harbour, the batteries of Goree opened fire upon it, despite the white flag which flew beside the Tricolour. Almost simultaneously other batteries opened fire on the inner warships of the French flotilla, which was under the command of Capitaine de Frégate d'Argenlieu. Commander d'Argenlieu in peace-time was Provincial of the Carmelites of France. Recalled to the navy on the outbreak of the war, he had preserved his faith in the British alliance. As the firing went on he was wounded.

An immediate signal was made to the shore in "plain" language, "Will be compelled to return fire unless firing ceases." The firing did not cease, and the guns of the British battleships lying out to cover the little expedition opened fire. The *Richelieu*, lying badly damaged in the harbour, still had her gun turrets in commission, and after a few moments added her fire to that of the cruisers and the shore batteries.

A further signal was made from the British force saying that if submarines came out, they would be attacked. Despite this warning three submarines came out between Goree and the mainland, submerged, and made attacks upon the Allied ships. The destroyers covering the force located two of these and attacked. Two of the Vichy submarines were sunk, the crew of one being rescued.

Bombers from the aircraft-carrier which accompanied the force carried out attacks on the *Richelieu* and on the batteries, and there were dog-fights between these and Vichy fighters which came up from the aerodrome behind the town.

It was clear that whatever the desire of the majority of the population to rejoin the fight against Germany and to throw in their lot with General de Gaulle, the authorities, stiffened immeasurably by the arrival of the cruisers, were determined to resist, and it was obvious that they had not only the determination but the means for a bloody holding. The Allies were present in considerably superior force. It would have been possible to have carried Dakar, but it would have meant loss—and heavy loss—both to the civil population and to the garrison. This was not a token resistance. It seems probable, on

the stories of people who have since come from Dakar, that it would not have been continued beyond perhaps twenty-four or forty-eight hours, but in that time a deep scar would have been cut across the ultimate relations of General de Gaulle and his own people, and between Britain and beaten France.

General de Gaulle declared that he was unwilling to shed the blood of his own countrymen, and the action was broken off.

The expedition returned to England, but some of the troops went on to French Equatorial Africa.

CHAPTER III

I

IN London the work of the French Admiralty went on, and in the narrow seas about England the service of the French Navy developed slowly, steadily.

In the Channel, facing their own coastline, there was being worked out the drama of the Channel convoy—that masterpiece of the small ships. Boulogne and Calais had fallen in the first great rush of the enemy. Dunkirk at one end of the Channel narrows, Cherbourg at the other, had passed into the hands of Germany. Two hundred miles of newly hostile coast lay against the sea routes of the southern coast of England. Even at Cherbourg the enemy were barely seventy miles from England. At Gris Nez they were seventeen miles from the route the convoys had to use. All along that coast lay aerodromes on which the bombers of the enemy were parked in insolence. On the Calais cliffs and above Boulogne the Germans placed their much-boasted long-range guns. In the cross-Channel harbours they stationed their divisions of fast motor-boats—the E-boats that carried mines and torpedoes for the half-hour run across the Channel. Along that passage they dropped the first magnetic mines.

But there was no breakdown of the southern convoys. We brought in the sea-going balloon barrage to hold the dive-bombers off the ships. We brought sweepers to counter the moored mines, and new and fantastic devices to counter the magnetic. We kept fighter patrols going above the ships. We put counter-batteries upon the Dover cliffs. And to answer the E-boat we brought small destroyers, M.L.s and the Fighting French *chasseurs*.

They are not beautiful, these little *chasseurs*—small ships with a mass of curious top hamper, irregular in outline. But they have done a beautiful job. I have gone down the Channel with the convoys in a winter gale, and I have watched these little ships plugging indomitably into the short, steep seas of *La Manche*. They have a clipper bow and from that a sort of turtle deck comes back to the forward gun. Aft of

that rises the high, square structure of the bridge, and behind that, well beyond the midships mark, is the funnel. I have seen the heavy green-white broken water—not the spray, but the broken water of a Channel sea—sweep clear back over that funnel.

Theirs has been a work of little thanks save from the merchantmen they cover week by week. There is little praise and little publicity. The towns of the south coast that get their coal that way, the industry of the southern cities that depends upon the work of those little ships for its fuel, know their importance.

They work closest to their own beloved France, and they see sometimes as the weather clears in a dawn off Dungeness or in the last of the evening light as they come into the Downs, the headlands of the Pas de Calais, the white cliffs and the green turf above them, the factory chimneys and the lighthouse of Calais, the dome of the cathedral of Boulogne.

There have been times when the Channel convoy was an endless battle. In a single run I have seen it bombed from the air, shelled from the Gris Nez guns, attacked by E-boats, and battered all the while by the Channel weather. On April 12th of 1941 a *chasseur* of the Fighting French Navy shot down a Junkers 88. On August 12th, 1942, it was announced that the *chasseur Rennes* had been lost by enemy action. Neither of these things—neither the victory nor, unhappily, the loss—stand by themselves. There have been other aircraft brought down, other ships sunk. The little ships of the French flotillas had played an admirable part long before they reached the height of their history when, with the British destroyers, the landing craft, the T.L.C.s—the ships of an amphibious operation—they went into the roadstead of Dieppe. The *chasseurs* were back in the waters of a French harbour; and off Dieppe they earned the admiration of all who watched them.

II

There were other small craft, and gradually their number was added to as the work of the recreated French Navy went on. On November 29th of 1940, General de Gaulle, in a broadcast to the people of dismembered France, was able to say that he had twenty warships in service. In the following January, Admiral Muselier, speaking of the development of his Command, said that despite the loss of two ships and a submarine, the French Fleet now had thirty warships in commission.

At the end of August of 1941 a division of motor-launches, built in Britain, was taken over by the French. Mainly these launches were officered and manned by Bretons of the Fighting French. Named after a Breton saint, each ship carried a flag presented by the Association of Bretons in the Free French forces. At a south coast port

on August 31st the ships of the division were blessed by the chief chaplain to the Free French Navy.

M.T.B.s followed them; and though, even now, much of the work of the Allied torpedo-boats along the enemy coasts is still a secret of the war, it is known that the French have taken part in many of those gallant actions.

One such account will serve. On the night of March 10th, 1943, a division of M.T.B.s of the 10th Motor-Torpedo Boat Flotilla (the French call them *vedettes lance-torpilles*) moved out of their base under the command of Capitaine de Corvette Meurville for patrol off the Brittany coast. On leaving base they found a heavy sea running in the Channel, and it seemed improbable that there would be any possibility of making a good attack should they have the good fortune to fall in with the enemy. Half-way across the width of the Channel, however, wind and sea moderated, and by the time they reached French waters there was an almost flat calm with fair visibility.

They worked over the area of the patrol without seeing any signs of the enemy, and were almost on the point of returning to base when the coxswain of Commander Meurville's M.T.B., who, according to his captain, "sees as well in the night as in the day," sighted two ships—one small, probably an R-boat, and the other large and probably a trawler.

The sea was covered with a low mist, and it was difficult to be certain of the strength or of the disposition of the enemy's forces, but Commander Meurville immediately signalled the presence of the enemy to the other vessels of the flotilla, and informed them that he was going in to the attack. His own ship was badly placed for an attack on the leading ship, but, at the critical moment, his coxswain sighted another and larger vessel following some distance behind the trawler. He turned at once to attack this better target, and at the same time the enemy sighted the little force and opened fire.

Running down the bearing given him by his coxswain, Commander Meurville made his firing position, and let go both torpedoes. At once he became the principal target for the enemy. Under a curtain of tracer bullets, he turned to withdraw. The water about him was pock-marked with falling shell fragments. Fountains of spray leapt up on either hand, ahead and astern of them. The firing of the enemy became more and more precise. "I was surrounded by large shells and balls of tracer brushed against our heads."

Through an inferno of fire from the automatic weapons of every ship of the German force that could bring a gun to bear Commander Meurville worked his engines up to full speed. And astern of him he saw an immense spout of water after what he describes as "an atrociously long wait" leap into the air and disappear at once behind a voluminous cloud of black smoke, which rose to a height of more

than two hundred feet. There was proof enough that his torpedoes had hit their target—a ship of approximately 2,000 tons.

For seven minutes a "first-class firework display" from the enemy ships continued, but Commander Meurville was not hit, and his ship suffered no casualties. Then the firing suddenly ceased as the little force passed out of visibility and out of range.

In that action the son of General de Gaulle was second-in-command of one of the little ships of the flotilla.

III

Beside the fast motor craft that worked the Channel waters there were several other small vessels—trawlers, auxiliaries of one type and another. One of the best-known of these was the anti-submarine trawler *Vikings*. A modern deep-sea trawler of considerable size, she was one of the latest vessels of her class to be built in France prior to the war, and she was converted early to the work of the anti-submarine patrol. After the collapse her first duties lay in the estuary of the Thames, in which she carried out useful work both on the anti-submarine guard and in escort of the east coast convoys.

There is an interesting account of her career written by a young man who in July of 1940 was Capitaine de Compagnie des Aspirants et Élèves Aspirants on board the old *Courbet*. Offered an appointment as Second Officer of a trawler, he accepted; but he recounts his doubts. He expected something fish-smelling, rat-infested, small and elderly. But he was determined to get back to sea; he was fired by the ambition that was representative of the youth of the French cause and of the French Navy. When after three days he left the *Courbet*, he found, "a well-shaped hull with a stem like that of the most modern liner, masts slender and tall, and stream-lined bridge and funnel; admirable quarters and a formidable armament."

He describes the crew as representative of France.

All the provinces, all the trades, all the ages, and later all the colours, had their representatives—fellows from the Île de Seine rubbed elbows with those of the Cannebière, men of the Navy with men of the Merchant Navy, fishermen with garage hands and students, young men with dark hair with men with hair already grey. But all formed a single entity because we all had one idea—to have a go at the Boche. We all had our memories of the flight of desperate women and children on the roads of France, of abandoned villages, of church steeples dark against a blazing background. On one occasion in my cabin a man had just been confessing his homesickness while smoking a cigarette that I offered him, and he told me of his flight: "It was midnight. I could not kiss my little girl in case I woke her."

From the Thames she was sent south—a long, difficult voyage, clear past West Africa that was still hostile and French Equatorial Africa

that had rallied to de Gaulle's banner, round the Cape of Good Hope and past Madagascar that was to be the setting for another of the painful scenes of this war, and up through the Red Sea to Alexandria.

Vikings, was one of the little ships of "Bomb Alley"—the little ships of the Tobruk force. From Tobruk to Famagusta in Cyprus she covered convoys, hunted U-boats, fought off aircraft. They were not spared, those little ships: they were expendable. And their work was like the work of the destroyers—it ceased only long enough for them to take stores, food, ammunition on board. When that was done they were at sea again. Her Second Officer says, "There were wry smiles sometimes on the face of the British officer in the roadstead, who brought us our orders for fresh jobs." But in those days they earned not the thanks, not the admiration only, but the love of the merchant ships with which they worked. Ships of "Bomb Alley" had an entity, a concrete life of their own, and *Vikings* stood well within that brotherhood.

And then in February of 1942, when she was running escort to a convoy in the middle of the night, there were two enormous shocks. Her Second Officer says:

There was no shouting, only the noise of the falling crockery, the mess tins which became unhooked, and the deep shuddering of the shell of the dying *Vikings*. Shadows moved and went towards the starboard side, the one place still almost horizontal. We advanced, all packed together on this slippery surface, all reunited for the last struggle. Suddenly the hull sank. The little group found itself in the fuel oil. We got away to avoid the eddy, then we all turned towards the ship which was sinking, the stern completely out of the water and almost vertical. And the propeller went on turning. Quietly, gently the *Vikings* disappeared, a last ripple, the ripple of the propeller—then nothing more. . . .

IV

In December of 1941 the steady increase of personnel and the satisfactory state of the Fighting French Fleet induced General de Gaulle to re-form the *Aeronavale*. Though there were few pilots available and ground staff and experienced officers were all lacking, it was decided to go ahead at once with the work. The task of forming the new arm was given to Capitaine de Corvette La Haye, who had distinguished himself in 1939 by making what was possibly the first successful attack on a submarine of the war.

On September 11th an enemy submarine was discovered working in the waters close to Malta, and Commander La Haye, Second Officer of a scouting squadron at the time, was covering the passage of a large Allied convoy through the Sicilian Channel. During his patrol he sighted and bombed the submarine, which was at periscope depth,

from a height of fifteen hundred feet. The first bomb fell sixty feet ahead of the periscope; the second about three feet to the right of it. When the foam and spray of the bomb bursts had disappeared, they could see from the 'plane an enormous patch of oil forming across the water.

In August of 1942 an agreement was reached between the U.S. Navy and the French Commander-in-Chief which covered the training of a French Fleet Air Arm squadron in American training schools. In October of 1942 the first officers, petty officers and men of this initial squadron arrived in America, and began training at Jacksonville in Florida and at other points in the southern United States. American officers have given a particularly good account of these early trainees.

On the completion of the course the squadron returned to England, and the first squadron—designed principally for reconnaissance duties, and commanded by Lieutenant de Vaisseau de Lévis-Mirepoix—commenced operations.

V

There was still another arm of the navy of the Fighting French. The *fusiliers-marins*, like the Marines of the Royal Navy, cherish a great tradition. Dixmude is blazoned in gold across their banners. To-day there is another name beside it—the name of a little place very far from the flat levels of the Belgian coast.

In 1940, as the Germans entered the port of Lorient, a warrant officer of the *fusiliers-marins*, who was planning his escape with those of a number of his friends, went back to his own ship for the purpose of bringing away the flag. He and his friends were compelled by the obvious circumstances of the time to travel without baggage, without encumbrances. The flag was bulky. As an alternative—remember the Germans were in Lorient by this time—he took off the medals and the decorations of the banner, made them into a rough bundle, and got back to the shore. He and his friends escaped in a dinghy, slipping out of the harbour under the noses of the enemy, and after forty-eight hours were picked up by a British destroyer.

The seed of a new corps was with them. Like most of the rest of the Free French Navy they went to the *Courbet*, as the cradle of the renascent Fleet. From there, as new arms and equipment came in, they developed their strength. Finally, after a period of shore training, they were sent to the Middle East.

Under Lieutenant-General Koenig and Major-General Larminat a Fighting French force moved forward with the Desert Army in the great sweep across Libya at the end of 1941 which freed Tobruk, and flung Rommel and his panzers back across "the desert and the sown" to the El Agheila line. In that great movement, where the towns of

the coast fell like milestones in the wake of the retreating army, the Free French force took part in the investment of Halfaya.

At El Agheila Rommel reorganised his force and turned. Benghazi, captured and recaptured, fell again to him. The Allied line rolled back to a great nebulous frontier across the desert, and for a while it lay quiescent. The Free French forces were still there on Wednesday, May 27th, when Rommel moved again. On that day his columns, including many tanks, moved eastward. During the night a large enemy armoured force advanced from the west to the south of the Allied lines round the desert outpost of Bir Hacheim. Early in the morning of the 27th that force was engaged by the Allied armour.

Bir Hacheim was held by the Fighting French and with them were the *fusiliers-marins*—they were a long way from the sea. Bir Hacheim lies at the apex of the great triangle which has as its base the coast between Gazala and Tobruk. Its importance lay in the fact that it was a strong point from which our forces could operate far down in the desert, and which had, therefore, either to be put out of action or to be circumnavigated. It was the anchor of the line which stretched from the desert to the sea.

The force which held it was composed partly of the Foreign Legion and partly of French Colonial troops, with anti-aircraft and other artillery and the *fusiliers-marins*. It lies on a plateau roughly two square miles in extent, and for the great part completely flat. "Bir" means a well, and a group of ruins surrounded the ancient water hole that long since then had dried. Protected by cunningly laid minefields and with a formidable barrier of barbed wire, it was a hedgehog of considerable strength.

On the first day Rommel attacked it with half of the Italian Ariete tank division supported by artillery and infantry. The enemy attacked on a broad front, coming from the south—about a hundred tanks in all. The French opened fire at two thousand yards, mainly with 75's which they had got from the Vichy Army after the Syrian campaign. By the time the attack had closed to a thousand yards fifteen tanks had been destroyed, but the others came on, and two actually penetrated the minefields and got in to within two hundred yards of one battery before they were hit. At that range they disintegrated. Thirty-seven tanks were destroyed in the first attack.

The loss was extremely heavy, and Rommel decided to surround the position and endeavour to starve it into submission. Water was desperately short, but on the third night a sortie captured an Italian tank lorry containing two thousand four hundred pints, and on the following day a British supply column got through with water and cigarettes.

To their encirclement the Germans added bombing. Wave on wave of Stukas fell upon the little garrison. Their shelter was exiguous

in the extreme. Round the site of the old well there were rock pits. In the sand they had dug slit-trenches and made small sandbag redoubts. There was no overhead shelter, and the men of that gallant garrison watched every bomb leave the racks of the Stukas and come whistling down towards them.

They survived—they even hit back. Night after night they sent out patrols that wrecked German transport and damaged German and Italian tanks, that killed men of both armies of the Axis.

After two days the Italians withdrew from the close encirclement, and the French columns went out boldly in the daylight, attacking that withdrawal and firing on the new positions that the Italians took up. They took a hundred prisoners in the early days. An Indian reinforcement joined them with British 25-pounders, and the position became stronger.

But supply difficulties were still acute. Bir Hacheim was virtually surrounded on all sides save for one narrow corridor, and the history of the supply parties is amongst the great stories of the fight.

For sixteen days they continued that astonishing resistance, battered all the time by Stukas despite the urgent and magnificent efforts of the R.A.F. and the South African Air Force. They were shelled by everything from light weapons to 210 mm. guns. Rommel sent down Italian reinforcements, and then, realising that they were useless, sent down picked German troops. By the first week of June in addition to the Trieste division and what remained of the Ariete, there was the famous German 90th light division, the 33rd reconnaissance unit, the 155th light infantry regiment, the 11th battery of the 25th anti-aircraft regiment, considerable artillery from the 90th division and patrols from the "Sonderverband 288th."

In the intense heat, in dust-storms and sand, assailed always by the plague of flies that hung above the barricades, waterless, at times desperately short of ammunition, the garrison hung on, holding Rommel's advance until, with the Knightsbridge battle and the great tank traps to the north of them, it became clear that a general withdrawal was not far off.

Meanwhile from the Axis side came in demand after demand to surrender. The first was a verbal summons brought in by Italian officers bearing white flags. They were told to "Go to the devil!" The second was a similar one. Again the Italians were told, this time with epithets. A third demand was brought in by a German Staff officer in a car with an enormous white flag flying above it, who stopped at a French strong point. The message, in Rommel's handwriting, was taken to Koenig. It called on the French garrison to surrender to avoid "useless shedding of blood." Again the answer was the same. Five times the demands were sent in, and five times Koenig, courageously, magnificently, sent back his answer.

And always the fight went on. The garrison had determined to hold Bir Hacheim, and there was nothing that either German or Italian could do that would shake their resolution. They were prepared to die to the last man.

They did not die.

On the night of June 10th/11th, on the direct orders of General Ritchie, the garrison of Bir Bacheim was withdrawn. A special communiqué from British G.H.Q., Middle East, said:

The Free French troops of the garrison under General Koenig have for sixteen days fought off large-scale attacks by infantry, tanks and aircraft and inflicted heavy losses on the Axis forces. They have played a vital part in upsetting the enemy's plans. Their magnificent fighting qualities have earned the admiration of the United Nations.

For sixteen days they had held this battered, thunderous, dust-enshrouded fragment of the desert. For sixteen days they had held Rommel's freedom of movement round the Allied southern flank. They had destroyed seventy tanks. They had been instrumental in the recapture from the enemy of more than a thousand Allied troops. They had inflicted heavy losses in men and material—and their rear-guard came back in captured German vehicles.

Bir Hacheim remains in all the brilliance and the gallantry of the desert battles, one of the great moments of their history. And in Bir Hacheim marines of the Free French Navy proved not only their efficiency, their quality to endure, their capacity to withstand punishment—but their spirit.

CHAPTER IV

I

THE *Narval*, the submarine whose commander had sent out that electrifying signal to the French Fleet as he cleared Bizerta harbour, was one of the first of the Free French units to go into action again against the enemy. But her impetuous spirit burned too strong to last. In December of 1940 she was on patrol in enemy waters. She did not return.

There were other submarines ready to take up the challenge that she perforce abandoned. At Cherbourg, when the Germans were advancing on the port, there was the submarine *Minerve*. She was literally "in pieces": her electrical gear was disconnected, her engines taken apart, for she was undergoing a considerable refit. Her commanding officer was given the apparently hopeless task of attempting to get her ready for sea. She was eleven years old, and her repair normally was no easy matter, but, spurred by the imminent danger of

German capture, dockyard workmen, crew, officers worked in a magnificent comradeship to get her away, and as the Germans came down the peninsula, she slipped out to sea and headed for England. At a British base she was taken over eventually by Admiral Muselier, but she required a long further refit before she was ready for sea.

Early in the Spring of 1941 she was operating with that extraordinary "Flotilla of the United Nations" which works from a northern base, a base where the notices are posted in five languages and the depot ships are polyglot. From there she went on patrol off the Norwegian coast and, working within a few hundred yards of the islets off Stavanger, she sighted a large tanker, heavily loaded and hugging the coast. Luck was with her, and she was able to make the firing position almost immediately. She fired one tube and, immediately after, a second. The first torpedo hit the tanker squarely amidships. There was an explosion which shook the submarine, and a tremendous, searing sheet of flame.

But the *Minerve* lost trim as the torpedoes left her. That faint error of judgment, which plays so great a part in submarine warfare, betrayed her for the fraction of a second. She broke surface and was sighted by the vessels of the tanker's escort. She had come up in the middle of them. There was a German destroyer a few yards away on her port hand; a little farther was an armed trawler; and overhead was a Nazi bomber. The plane attacked in the instant of their sighting it, and they heard the rattle of machine-gun bullets on their superstructure even as they crash-dived.

They went to the bottom like the proverbial stone, and, as they lay there, the hunt began. For forty minutes there was a rain of depth charges and bombs. They averaged a depth charge every two minutes. But though the *Minerve*, to quote the words of her captain, Lieutenant de Vaisseau Sonnevile, "shuddered and trembled, quivered like a jelly, creaked and vibrated like a house in a tornado," she was not damaged.

They waited while the propellers threshed overhead in the strange, dramatic crescendo and decrescendo of attack. Their oxygen began to get short and the air thicker and more difficult to breathe. Hour after hour went by. They stopped talking to save oxygen. They took off their boots to maintain silence after one man's feet had clattered on the steel of the deck. And they waited.

At nightfall there was a lull, and they talked it over and began to prepare to surface. But almost immediately the beat of the propellers came in again and the thud of the depth charges. For thirteen hours they jolted and gave to the attacks. And then suddenly, after three depth charges had gone off in a swiftly increasing thunder so that it seemed as, if there were a fourth, they must be crushed—there was silence. There was no fourth.

In the darkness they surfaced, thirteen hours after the attack, and limped back slowly to base.

In August, 1941 another submarine, *Le Jour de Gloire*, sank a 4,000-ton ship almost on the coast of Germany. They were, in the words of her commander:

very deep into the Hun's own territory when we sighted a convoy. We attacked the biggest ship, of about 4,000 tons, and let fly. *Eh bien!* We hit her. She started sinking almost at once, but a sweeter sight to us was the panic and confusion amongst our enemy. There was a great scattering and confusion to and fro. Soon the escort vessels began to make things uncomfortable for us with their depth charges. They shook our ship.

They shook her to some purpose. Though under water they did not perceive any obvious damage, they were violently thrown about by the explosion of charges close to their hull. At times they were at periscope depth, and once they saw an armed trawler pass close to them—so close they could see her captain peering intently ahead from the bridge, missing them as they slid by almost below the sheer of his ship on the port side.

In the darkness the hunt was abandoned and they surfaced. When they tried to submerge again they found that extensive damage on the outside of the hull made this impossible. They found too that the batteries had been damaged, and that the spaces below were filling with chlorine gas. Very slowly they moved off on the surface, and while they moved, attempted to repair the damage. Wearing masks, they worked in five-minute spells below, kept going by doses of aspirin.

For two days and two nights they continued on the surface—remember they were attacked almost within sight of the German coast. Aircraft passed them by, and failed somehow to see them. By some miracle they were not seen by surface ships or by enemy patrols. The forty-eight men of the crew slept on deck, sunbathed by day and shivered at night. Their pet dog shared their exposure. They were in hopeless case had they been sighted by almost anything. They were not sighted, and they got clear away to fight again upon another day.

Rubis, which had come in from patrol under the old régime to carry on her work with the new Command from a British port, also distinguished herself; so did *Minerve*.

There remained the *Surcouf*—the greatest of them all. In June of 1940 *Surcouf* limped into Plymouth on one engine. Like the *Minerve*, she was undergoing repairs. They faced all the enormous difficulties of refitting her and of manning her—and early in 1941 she was ready for sea. She carried out various patrols until the latter part of the year, when she went on what the French called "propa-

ganda calls" to the Bermudas and the ports of the eastern seaboard of the United States." She was on the eastern seaboard of North America in December of 1941.

The twin islands of St. Pierre et Miquelon lie under the lee of Newfoundland off the Burin Peninsula, between Fortune Bay and Cape Breton Island. They are small—the population insignificant; but they had potential value to the enemy, for on St. Pierre a wireless station had been built, and the broadcasting of meteorological information from it was of considerable use to the Luftwaffe. Moreover, it was within the bounds of possibility that information as to Allied convoys moving in and out of the St. Lawrence might from there have reached enemy sources. The Governor of the island was known to be violently pro-Vichy, and it was said that repressive measures had been used against members of the population who had expressed opposite views.

On the night of December 23rd, 1941, *Surcouf* led three corvettes, *Mimosa*, *Alysse* and *Aconit*, into an anchorage in the island, and a landing party which had been on board *Surcouf* was transferred to *Mimosa*. The Free French force was under the command of Admiral Muselier himself. The services of a pilot who knew the harbour of St. Pierre had been previously arranged for, and, with the *Surcouf* on guard at the entrance, the three ships slipped into the ice-choked harbour. There was no opposition. There was scarcely any possibility of opposition. The Vichy officers surrendered at once, and in a plebiscite which was held on Christmas Day the islands declared with an extraordinary unanimity for General de Gaulle. There was considerable political difficulty both with the United States and with Great Britain over this sudden and secret seizure, but the obvious desire of the islands as a whole to go over to the Allied cause was a determining factor in the eventual acceptance of the new status. From the islands, whose principal industries were fishing and coastwise shipping, came a fresh flow of recruits for the Free French Navy.

Surcouf, when the operation was complete, returned to England. Caught in one of the heavy raiding attacks on an English naval base, she was damaged and sustained some casualties. The damage was repaired, and she went to sea once more on patrol. Early in 1942 she joined her fellows of the great and gallant list of missing submarines.

II

In the early days of the Free French Navy Admiral Muselier had available the destroyer *Triomphant*—which was under the command of Admiral (then Captain) Auboyneau—the destroyer *Léopard* of 2,126 tons and the small destroyers *Bouclier* and *Melpomène*. The light ships were used for coastwise convoy work while the heavier ships

were used for deep-sea purposes. But, owing to the difficulties to which I have referred before of refit and repair in foreign yards, the complete dissimilarity of standard parts and of engineering practice, it was inevitable that a considerable proportion of these ships' time was spent in dockyard hands.

In a lesser degree this applied to the simpler and less complex ships—*Commandant Duboc* and others—and it was therefore decided in principle that the Free French Navy should receive corvettes designed for the special purpose of the Battle of the Atlantic as early as possible. *Alysse*, *Aconit*, *Roselys*, *Lobelia* and others—ships of the class that were known frivolously in the Royal Navy, when their increasing numbers brought the search for names into the more obscure realms of horticulture, as “Mr. Middleton's Light Horse”—were added to Admiral Muselier's Command.

Their record has been an admirable one. All over the Atlantic they have worked, and in the Mediterranean. They have taken part in a score of the deadly skirmishes that make the Battle of the Atlantic. They have taken their toll of submarines—the Fighting French Navy claims more than a dozen sinkings or probable sinkings—and they have suffered. In February of 1942 the corvette *Alysse* was sunk in the Atlantic. Her captain, Pepin le Halleur, was wounded; thirty-four of her small crew were missing. *Mimosa* was sunk by enemy action in June of the same year.

Against those losses they have notable achievements. In January of 1942 the corvette *Roselys*, under the command of Lieutenant de Vaisseau André Bergeret, was on convoy escort duty in the Atlantic. She was working in the screen when a U-boat was sighted on the surface on her starboard bow at a distance of about four hundred yards. The corvette's helm was immediately put over and she prepared to ram. The U-boat crash-dived, but she was unable to submerge rapidly enough and was hit by the *Roselys*' bow. The conning tower heeled over wildly, and it was apparent that the submarine was much damaged. As *Roselys* passed clear, she dropped depth charges. No prisoners were taken and no wreckage picked up, but it is clear that the submarine was seriously damaged at the very least, and it seems possible that she was sunk. No casualties or damage were suffered by the corvette.

There is another story of a sinking in which evidence was difficult. It is not the *Roselys*—but it is reported that a Free French officer, a man of the old school, hard-bitten and dour, came in to report on his return from a convoy run. He announced that he had depth-charged a submarine, and believed that he had sunk it. Asked if he had picked up any evidence, he said, “No.” The Intelligence Officer asked, “Nothing floating?” He said, “No.” The Intelligence Officer said, “You didn't even dip a rag in the oil to bring us proof?”

Again the other replied, "No." The Intelligence Officer said, "Well it sounds as if it was a probable, but I don't think we can allow it as definitely sunk." The captain nodded his head, shrugged his shoulders, and made for the door. As he reached it, he said, "I'm damned if I know then what I'm going to do with the twenty Boche prisoners from her crew that I took on board."

The *Lobelia*, another of the corvettes, has a long and arduous record. Murmansk and the frozen seas of the North Cape have seen her working, and the sea routes of the Atlantic know her well. Her captain, Lieutenant de Vaisseau De Morsier, has said recently that within two months he intercepted and attacked eight submarines before they could fire their torpedoes into the convoys he was protecting. The work of the convoy escort does not often permit of long delay even in the attacking of a submarine. To wait over an enemy already thrown off his aim and shaken is perhaps to open the convoy to fresh attack, and proofs as to the result of those eight attacks are incomplete. But it is considered that one at least of the submarines attacked was sunk, and one other seriously damaged. Some of those attacks were carried out with the ship cased in ice. Handling depth-charges is never an easy matter. When the traps have to be kept clear of ice, when the charges have to be chipped out of sheets of frozen spray, when the loading and the handling of the enormous canisters is hard and blocked everywhere by water that freezes even while men look at it, the quality of vigilance that is implied in this succession of instant attacks is obvious.

The corvettes are not only escorts: they have been rescue ships as well. On one occasion *Roselys*, acting in this capacity, picked up sixty-five survivors from a torpedoed ship. But the best record of all is held perhaps by the *Aconit*. The aconite is the wolfsbane—the "deadly wolfsbane." The *Aconit* has been deadly.

In May of 1943 the destroyer *Harvester* was commanding the escort of a convoy in the Atlantic. About midnight she located a U-boat with the Asdic instrument and, dropping depth-charges, forced her to the surface. Turning swiftly, the *Harvester* came back to ram. The U-boat, unable to get away, was square in the path of the destroyer, and *Harvester* overran the ship, which jammed under her stern and remained fast for several minutes before breaking clear. The *Aconit*, under Lieutenant de Vaisseau Jean Lavasseur, came in to the assistance of *Harvester* and, as she approached, sighted the damaged U-boat on the surface. "I switched my searchlights full on to blind the crew of the first U-boat, and opened fire," said Lieutenant Lavasseur. "I then rammed her immediately abreast of the conning-tower, dropping depth-charges as my corvette passed over her. She sank on the spot."

Harvester had been damaged in her collision; her propellers had caught in the superstructure of the battered U-boat, and it was some

minutes before she could get under way. Even then she could only move extremely slowly. Commander A. A. 'tait, R.N., her captain, however, instructed *Aconit* to return to the convoy which was still in danger of attack, leaving him to rejoin as best he could. The *Aconit* had regained her station when the *Harvester* was compelled to stop to make readjustments, and, as she stopped, she was torpedoed and sunk. *Aconit* immediately left the convoy to go back and pick up survivors. As she was doing this she sighted a second U-boat.

I was closing in [said her commanding officer], to pick up survivors when I saw a U-boat on the surface. It dived. As the weather was calm and many of the *Harvester's* crew had taken to rafts, I decided to counter-attack the U-boat before going to their assistance.

I dropped two patterns of depth charges, and these blew the U-boat to the surface. I engaged it with all the armament I had got.

My third shot from the 4-inch gun hit the U-boat and we scored three more hits in rapid succession. The enemy was so obviously *hors de combat* that I put my engines full astern to avoid ramming and damaging my ship. But we had too much way on her. The U-boat's crew jumped into the water. We rammed her on the conning-tower. The shape of the U-boat gave way to a huge patch of oil.

We picked up twenty prisoners on the spot. When they declared that it was their U-boat which had torpedoed the *Harvester*, it was a great pleasure to me to learn that I had avenged my senior officer so quickly.

Harvester had previously picked up forty survivors of a torpedoed merchant ship, and those who survived this second sinking were picked up by *Aconit* together with the survivors from the *Harvester*. Many of the men were seriously in need of medical attention, and the doctor of the Polish destroyer *Burza* was dropped overboard with his instruments on a Carley float, and paddled his way across to the Frenchman to give medical assistance.

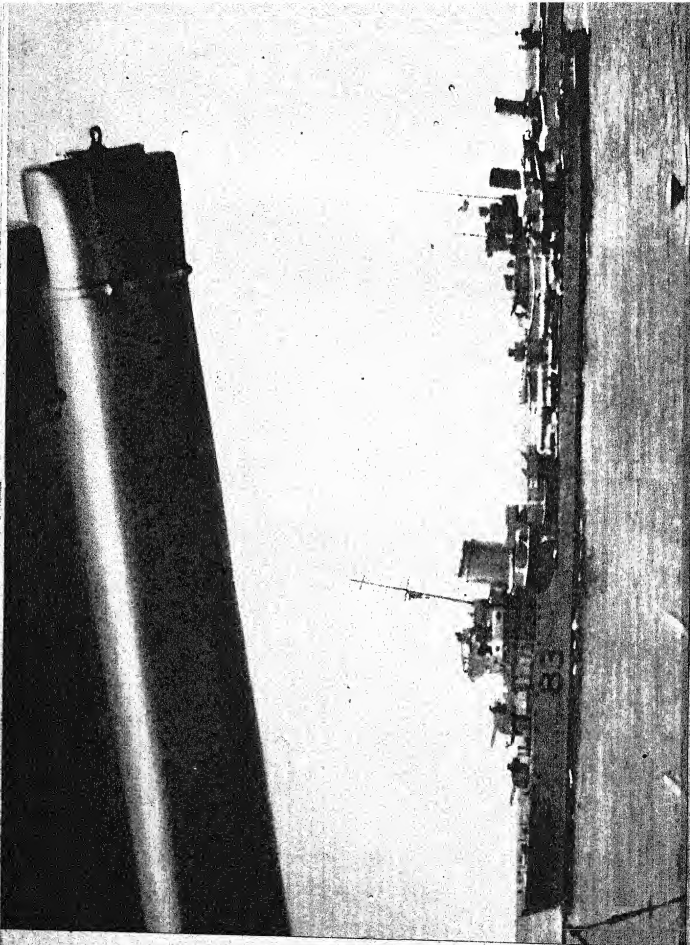
III

The work of the Free French Navy went on. The *Aconit's* action, the exploits of the *Roselys* and the *Lobelia*, the magnificent achievements of the submarines, are the high lights. Behind them there is the steady grind, the silent, unspectacular, endless, important work of the convoys and the patrols.

As the months went on the Fighting French Navy grew. The Command changed. Early in April, 1942 Admiral Muselier resigned his post as Commander-in-Chief of the Free French Navy and National Commissioner for the Navy in General de Gaulle's Government. His place was taken by Admiral Auboyneau, who had come from Alexandria in the early days of the collapse to take command of the destroyer



The corvette "Aconit" about to ram a German U-Boat.



Greek destroyers under the guns of the "Aviroff."

Triumphant. In her he had gone out to eastern waters, where he was senior officer of the French units in the Pacific. Under his leadership the fight went on.

The navy of Fighting France hoped always—the North African landings built up those hopes—that some day, some time, the remainder of the navy of France—the big ships that had been repaired since Oran and since Dakar, the real French Navy—would see the folly of its allegiance to the men of Vichy, would realise where the path of greatness lay.

The North African landings were followed by the flooding of the Germans over the rest of unoccupied France. It was thought then that the navy must come out. Its great bases to the south—at Casablanca, at Oran, at Algiers—were in Allied hands. Dakar was out of the power of Vichy, about to throw in its lot with the Allies. North Africa was free again. The taking of Bizerta and Tunis was a matter only of time. If ever the French Navy was to come out it was now. There was nothing left of France to be bargained for. We hoped in Algiers and in Tunisia, they hoped at the headquarters of the Fighting French. There was still a path to glory.

On Midsummer Day of 1919 the British Grand Fleet put out to sea from Scapa Flow for exercises. At ten o'clock in the forenoon Vice-Admiral von Reuter gave the order to make the pre-arranged signal for ships to be sunk at once. By dusk the German Fleet had disappeared.

Early on the morning of November 28th, 1942, German troops and tanks swept in to the French naval base of Toulon. Six hours later, according to a statement made on December 8th, 1943, by Mr. Secretary Knox of the American Navy, three-quarters of the ships of the French Navy in Toulon were sunk. Two submarines, however, courageously slipped out of harbour and reached their Free French colleagues at Algiers.

These two are the most remarkable examples of the self-immolation of navies in history. The one has a logical explanation. History may perhaps find an adequate explanation of the other. It may perhaps find an explanation, but the explanation will not be one of logic.

IV

But with Toulon fell any hopes of a re-assumption of Axis strength in the Mediterranean, any possible hope of the recapture of North Africa. The cowardice and incapacity of the Italian Navy had long since rendered it a cipher in Mediterranean affairs. And without reinforcement from the ships of Toulon the German High Command, despite its despairing attempt to take over the command of the Italian

Fleet, could not hope to reassert sea power even in the narrows of the Central Mediterranean.

North Africa was French again—the real France. The navy of the Fighting French had a home again: it was no longer a navy-in-exile. When General de Gaulle and Admiral Auboyneau went to Algiers the ships of the Fighting French were the navy of France again.

YUGOSLAVIA

AT the beginning of March, 1941 the position of the Italian armies—humiliated by the stubborn resistance of the Greeks, defied by the tiny Greek Navy, and beaten back along the frontiers of their too easily conquered Albania—was such that to ward off disaster aid from the stronger partner of the Axis was essential.

To bring effective aid to Italy and, at the same time, to secure the Balkan peninsula (with its potential of raw materials, its possibilities of army manpower and of labour for the Axis) it was desirable that Yugoslavia should be included in the German war economy. Roumania was already on the Axis side; Bulgaria on March 1st had thrown in her lot with Germany, and the German General Staff had immediately dispatched heavy motorised and armoured columns into that country from the Roumanian concentration areas. It would have been possible to mount a German offensive against Greece through these two countries by way of the north-south roads and the railway line that runs through Sofia and across the Danube at Vidin; but the natural route of an army coming to the rescue of the bewildered Italians on the high mountains was the line Vienna-Budapest-Belgrade. On March 1st a Turkish broadcast warned Yugoslavia not to join the Axis. From that day on there was a constant flow of rumour and foreboding emanating from Belgrade and the adjacent capitals.

By the end of the first week of March it was known that Germany was exerting growing pressure on Yugoslavia, and opposition to Prince Paul's apparent acquiescence to the increased German demands grew rapidly. On March 10th it was reported that Germany had made a formal demand for the country to join the Axis. On March 21st there was a serious split in the Yugoslav Cabinet, and it was becoming rapidly clear that public opinion was definitely against any co-operation with the Axis. On March 24th the Yugoslav Premier and the Foreign Minister left Belgrade for Vienna to sign an agreement with Germany. On March 26th serious rioting broke out in Yugoslavia. On March 27th Mr. Churchill said in London: "The Yugoslav nation has found its soul." A new Government, headed by General Simovitch, had ousted the pro-Axis party in the Yugoslav Parliament. Prince Paul, the Regent, had been forced to resign. The young King Peter had assumed full responsibility, and the agreement with Germany was cancelled.

On Sunday, April 6th, the Germans invaded Yugoslavia.

This is the calendar of Yugoslavia's greatness—the diary of one of the most tremendous acts of defiance against the colossal and vic-

torious power of the Axis that Europe has known. Against its Government the spirit of a free people surged up into a tremendous demonstration of courage.

Yugoslavia was strategically indefensible. To the north Austria and Hungary were hostile. To the east Roumania and Bulgaria had joined the Axis. To the south there was only the narrow outline of a Greece already extended to the utmost against the strength of Italy. Her back was to the Adriatic Sea dominated by the Italian Fleet. Yet, out of that rising of March 27th grew perhaps the most fantastic campaign of the war—the fight of the Guerillas of Yugoslavia that held the Italians in terror along the beaches of their conquest; that baffled and broke one German commander after another; that made of its mountains fortresses again; and that, with the fall of Italy and the final dilemma of Germany in the Balkans, was to flood down to the sea in an astonishing display of courage and of strength and seize—besides other parts of the country—the coasts of Dalmatia and the whole of Slovenia.

In April of 1941 that day was long removed. Yet even with the first challenge of Germany the Yugoslavs were fighting, and on the sea the tiny navy planned its co-operation.

The Yugoslav Navy consisted of the old training cruiser *Dalmacija* (the ex-German cruiser *Niobe*, which had been built prior to 1900 and was useless as a vessel of war); the flotilla leader *Dubrovnik*—the principal fighting unit—a heavy destroyer of 1,900 tons, built in Great Britain in 1932 and mounting four 5.5-inch guns; a new heavy destroyer of approximately the same size that was still under construction; and three smaller destroyers of 1,200 tons built between 1937 and 1938 at St. Nazaire and at Split with the co-operation of Yarrow (Glasgow)—*Beograd*, *Ljubljana* and *Zagreb*. They mounted four 4.7-inch guns and six 21-inch torpedo tubes. One of them—*Ljubljana*—heavily damaged before the outbreak of war, was in dockyard hands undergoing extensive repairs. In addition there were eight ex-Austrian torpedo-boats of 1913 vintage, eight modern motor torpedo-boats of the "Orjen" class (60-ton ships with a theoretic speed of thirty-four knots) and two very old small coastal M.T.B.s of thirty-seven knots. There were also four submarines, all fourteen years old, two of them of the British "L" type and two French vessels built at Nantes; and half a dozen small minelayers, one aircraft tender of 2,000 tons and a number of auxiliaries. Most of these ships were concentrated at Kotor (better known perhaps to English tourists as Cattaro), the deep harbour that lies in the heart of the southernmost sector of the Dalmatian coast close to the Albanian frontier.

In the northern sector of the Dalmatian coast lies the Italian enclave of Zara, a port and town with a hinterland of some forty-two square

miles and a population of something over twenty thousand. In the tangled history of the Balkan peninsula Zara has changed hands with the frequency of a shuttlecock. Always it has been a thorn in the flesh of whoever held the hinterland. In this new war it might well prove a bridge-head to invasion, and the first determination of the Yugoslav High Command was to neutralise that possibility. A concentration of naval craft at Sibenik, fifty miles to the south, as a preliminary to an attack, was determined upon, and to that port went four of the old torpedo-boats, six motor torpedo-boats and the two old coastal M.T.B.s. Two submarines were to have joined.

The attack never materialised. On April 9th the Germans broke into the Croat areas to the north. The situation deteriorated with alarming speed, and the forces which were to have dealt with Zara were diverted elsewhere. The naval craft re-concentrated at Kotor.

All this time they were under the domination of the Italian air. Sibenik is little over a hundred miles from San Benedetto on the Italian mainland. Zara itself was barely ninety miles. Kotor was less than a hundred and thirty miles from Bari. The ships were bombed constantly. At Sibenik they suffered casualties both through splinters from near misses by dive-bombers and through machine-gunning. The *Beograd* was damaged by a near miss and her star-board engine put out of action. There was other damage.

Rapidly the situation grew worse. The mobilisation of the army was incomplete at the declaration of war, its supplies insufficient, its equipment not calculated to stand the thrust of the German panzer divisions in their strength. On April 11th Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, was occupied—the day that Zara was to have been taken. Despite the heroic attempts of part of the army, working from strong mountain positions, the picture of the campaign as a whole darkened. On April 13th the Germans occupied Belgrade, and on the 14th the new Government—with its territory overrun in the north and in the east, with its armies apparently defeated, its supply position impossible, and hope of Allied intervention receding hourly—was compelled to ask for an armistice.

By the terms of that armistice the little Yugoslav Navy was to be handed over. By six o'clock on the evening of April 17th the crews were to be marched ashore.

Neither the patriots of the Yugoslav Army nor the patriots of the Navy accepted that armistice in its entirety. By all the rules of war, by all the rules of chance even, their situation was hopeless. Hemmed in, short of ammunition, desperately poor in modern weapons, it seemed impossible that the army could continue to fight—yet it continued through three great-hearted years.

The position of the navy was even worse. The Adriatic is narrow

through all its length. Every mile of it was surveyed by the Italian and—what was much worse—the German aircraft. There was no safety to the north where occupied Croatia merged with the borders of Italy. There was no safety to the south where the Greeks, cut off from the Yugoslavs by the thrust from the east, were falling back tragically upon their capital and upon the islands. There was no way out except through the Straits of Otranto—the bottle-neck of the Adriatic, both coasts of which were in Italian hands—only fifty miles across between Otranto and Valona. To seal that narrow gap was all the strength of the Adriatic forces of the Italian Navy; with anything the Italians chose to send up from their main naval base of Taranto, just round the corner of the “heel” of Italy. The fate of the Yugoslav Navy was certain.

On April 17th the crews of the big ships went ashore a little before six o'clock. Immediately afterwards, with a tremendous explosion, the destroyer *Zagreb* blew up. Two of her officers, Lieutenant Spasic and Lieutenant Masera, had stayed when the others went ashore. They blew themselves up with her magazine.

About the harbour, as the thunder of that explosion echoed about the high hills, two motor torpedo-boats and one old submarine put out to sea.

The *Kajmakalan* and the *Durmitor* were modern motor torpedo-boats of the “Orjen” class, little 60-tonners, carrying two 18-inch torpedoes, one pom-pom, and with a complement of fourteen men. They had three Mercedes-Benz motors of 3,000 horse-power, and were capable, when opened up and in perfect condition, of a speed of thirty-four knots. Neither of the ships was in perfect condition. They had been on a war footing for many months in the trouble of the times. Their bottoms were foul, and *Durmitor* had damaged two of her propellers. The best speed that they could get was twenty-nine knots, but in view of the length of the passage an economic speed of eighteen knots was imperative.

The submarine was the *Neboysa*—her name means “Dreadnought,” and she lived up to the challenge of her name. She was a British “L” type ship, carrying six 21-inch torpedo tubes, with a surface speed of fifteen knots and a submerged speed of ten. She was very old as submarines go. Her batteries were in bad condition and, owing to structural damage, she was unable to submerge to more than half her normal depth. Despite these deficiencies she too set out to challenge the blockade of the Italian Navy.

There was no secrecy in those departures—there could not be. Already the commissioners of the armistice were in Kotor, and signals announcing their departure must have been sent even as they cleared the harbour entrance. But outside the entrance to the deep bay they turned resolutely south, defying fortune. The *Neboysa* came through

unchallenged save by the endless perversity of inanimate objects. She was never fit for that long voyage—yet she made it.

Kajmakčalan and *Durmitor* were challenged.

By dark they were a little north of Valona, pushing south as hard as they could go. They were heavily overloaded. In addition to their normal complement they had on board a number of officers and men who had determined upon escape. Captain Kern (who was in *Kajmakčalan* and who commanded the tiny expedition) heard from Captain Larkin, R.N., who had been in Kotor, that he was endeavouring to obtain naval assistance to take off the British Minister from Belgrade with his staff, and the members of the British colony and diplomats from other points of the Balkan peninsula. Captain Larkin had managed to get signals through to Alexandria, but no definite replies had been received. There was a remote possibility, therefore, that a British force might attempt the dangerous passage of the narrows, and the problem of identification of vessels was difficult. Captain Kern knew that his only chance of escape, if he were challenged by Italian ships, lay in delivering a sudden attack and getting away in the probable confusion that would follow; but, in view of the possibility of British ships coming up, his hands were tied.

In the darkness a line of destroyers, eleven in all, were sighted ahead of the *Kajmakčalan*. It was impossible to identify them, and Captain Kern felt himself unable to attack.

The speed of the Italian destroyers was, for the most part, in the neighbourhood of thirty-five knots; some of them were said to be capable of forty. The utmost speed which these two overloaded little ships could manage was twenty-nine. There was no hope, therefore, in flight. The broadside weight of the average Italian destroyer mounting four 4·7-inch guns, was about two hundred pounds. The broadside weight of Captain Kern's whole flotilla of two ships, each mounting one pom-pom, was two pounds. They carried four torpedoes between them, and there were eleven destroyers ahead.

And from the leading ship came the swift flicker of the challenge of the night. The Yugoslavs could not fight. They could not run. There was no shadow of hope. But Captain Kern stood on—and as the flickering signal lamp finished the challenge, he had one of those astonishing inspirations that come once in a lifetime. He told the signalman to make the challenge instantly to the second ship of the Italian line. Swiftly it flashed across the growing darkness, and the Italian obediently, and as swiftly, made back the reply. Captain Kern passed on the reply to the first challenger, who somehow, for some reason, had not opened fire in the delay, and steamed boldly clear through the Italian line. Long before the bemused Italians had realised the ruse they were out of sight in the darkness.

But the danger was not yet over. South of Valona they came upon

a second line of searching craft. There is no doubt that these two forces had come out in answer to the signals from Kotor that gave the news of the little ships' escape. They were deliberately searching for them. This second line was composed partly of destroyers and partly of other craft. Again they were sighted, and again through the night came the challenge. And once again Captain Kern, secure in the knowledge of the stupidity of his enemy, made the reply and headed on.

There are few stories to match this in all the history of naval ruse and naval boldness. It was the master trick, and it won the due reward of mastership. By the next morning *Kajmakčalan* and *Durmitor* were safely through the Straits of Otranto. They crept down the Greek coast, dodging the threat of the enemy air, and by the 19th they were in Navarino Bay.

On the 22nd they arrived at Suda Bay in Crete. Two days after they were followed in by the *Neboysha*. Just before they had arrived there had come in eleven of the small seaplanes of the Yugoslav Fleet Air Arm. They were all that was left of the navy of Yugoslavia. They were the Free Navy.

II

Their service as a Free Navy began at once. There was no rest period. Captain Morse, R.N., Senior Naval Officer at Suda Bay at the time, found himself with a convoy for Alexandria upon his hands, and no vessels for escort. It was particularly desirable to attempt to cover it against the threat of the Stukas in the daylight hours. Captain Kern was asked to take the convoy south to Alexandria with his two 60-tonners.

There were complications—complications that seem at this distance almost ludicrous. The three engines of the motor torpedo-boats developed 3,000 horse-power and gave them, in their then condition, twenty-nine knots. At the slowest speed of one engine they did fourteen knots. But the convoy did nine. There was a small cruising engine, but it was capable of running only for short periods. And the speed of the motor torpedo-boats on that small engine was eight knots—but the convoy speed was still nine, and it was essential to keep it at its maximum speed for as long as possible.

They achieved a compromise. The convoy left at darkness at its full speed, and a rendezvous was arranged for dawn when the Stukas might become dangerous. The motor torpedo-boats left late in the night, and at convenient cruising speed caught up with the merchantmen and were in position at dawn. Throughout the long day they juggled their speeds to fit each other. By nightfall, having brought the convoy safely through the Stuka area—the most dangerous part of the passage—they went ahead again according to the plan made before their departure from Suda Bay. They reached Alexandria safely.

But there was a last moment of comedy as they approached the minefields off the port. It was necessary to sight the signal buoy that marked the entrance to the swept channel ; but precise navigation in small craft is difficult and the view from an M.T.B.'s deck is circumscribed. There was much anxiety as to whether they would make their landfall. The second night was approaching, the sea rising, and the M.T.B.s had used almost all their reserve of fuel. The buoy was dead ahead of *Kajmakčalan* when it was sighted.

The seaplanes had preceded them to Alexandria, making the long hop safely minus one of their number which, damaged, had had to be destroyed at Suda Bay. *Neboysha* arrived a little after. The Yugoslav Navy was concentrated again.

At once they went on to a routine that used what they had to offer to the utmost stretch of its capabilities. The M.T.B.s patrolled the seaward approaches to Alexandria against the possibility of attack by enemy light craft. The seaplanes patrolled further afield on the same account.

There was no reserve of manpower for the Yugoslavs to call upon, and, hemmed in on all sides, it was terribly difficult for patriots to escape. Moreover, there was a centre for the most ardent in Yugoslavia itself in the guerilla armies that fought so magnificently along the mountain chains. But still from time to time reinforcements trickled in.

One by one, however, the seaplanes fell out. Some were destroyed in combat with the enemy. Some were lost by accident. But the rest died through that disaster of all 'planes away from their bases—lack of spare parts and equipment. The pilots who had brought them so gallantly out of disaster were transferred to the cosmopolitan squadrons of the R.A.F.

There remained the motor torpedo-boats. Slowly, too, the end of their period of usefulness came in sight. Parts for their Mercedes-Benz motors were unobtainable: spares did not exist; and where replacements were essential, parts had to be made specially in the dockyards of the Middle East. They fought—and still fight—a gallant, but a slowly losing battle against obsolescence.

Despite these difficulties there was no question of allowing the Yugoslav Navy to disappear. Somehow, by some miracle, it had obtained personnel—seamen with that same eager thirst for freedom that had brought *Kajmakčalan* and *Durmitor* the long miles southward to Alexandria on their last litres of petrol. Even as the guerillas swept down from the mountains to the coast, the men of the Free Navy of Yugoslavia were preparing to take over a British corvette, and crews to man further ships are already becoming available. To-day they are at sea again in the complex battles of the oceans that are part of the one great fight for freedom.

BELGIUM

THE decision to form the "Section Belge" of the Royal Navy was made as the result of a series of discussions between Mr. van Kampenhout, the Minister for Communications and head of the Marine Department of the Belgian Government in exile, and Admiral Dickens towards the end of 1940. By early 1941 most of the preliminary work had been done, and on the 3rd April an Admiralty Fleet Order formally constituted the new addition to the fighting navies. The Fleet Order contains a proviso of extraordinary interest—one that is, I think, unique in British naval history. It says:

Vessels manned by the Royal Navy (Section Belge) are to wear:
(a) Belgian ensign and White Ensign side by side at the ensign staff or peak.

Before the war there was no Belgian Navy. There was the State Marine, which existed principally for fishery protection and police duties, and which for a long time worked with a single ship—the old British sloop *Zinnia*—and a sail training ship *Mercator*. *Zinnia*, however, was at the time of the German invasion out of commission, and was about to be replaced by the *Artevelde* of 2,000 tons. This ship, incomplete, was blown up on the stocks of the Cockerill yards.

But in the Belgian Merchant Marine—the great majority of the ships of which had come to British or Allied ports after the collapse of Belgium—there were a large number of men who were deeply anxious to have a chance of hitting back at the enemy upon the sea. Out of these and out of the large number of small craft that had escaped to England in the dramatic days of the overrunning of the Low Countries, the new navy was made. The first ship was the Belgian pilot cutter No. 6, renamed H.M.S. *Kernot*. With her were four patrol trawlers—*Phrontas*, *Electra II*, *Rheatia* and *Sheldon*. There was also one ex-French fishery protection vessel, *Quentin Roosevelt*. For almost a year, while ratings were trained and habituated to the use of war, these ships constituted the Section Belge. They did excellent work on off-shore patrols, while *Kernot* served—and still serves—as inspection vessel for one of the greatest of all British ports.

But by the beginning of 1942 the Belgians had become ambitious, and with the proved efficiency of their men, the Admiralty considered the time ripe for them to be provided with sea-going ships. Accordingly, early in 1942 two corvettes, *Buttercup* and *Godelia*, were handed over to the Section to be manned entirely by Belgians. Despite certain difficulties—due in the main to the cleft between the French- and the Flemish-speaking peoples of the Belgian community—they have proved

efficient, hard-working and extremely useful additions to the escort forces that have played so vital a part in this war.

The *Quentin Roosevelt* was paid off at this time, and the corvettes were sent to the eastern seaboard of America at a time when the losses of the prolonged and vicious U-boat campaign off the American coast were creating considerable difficulties for the United States. They served for six months up and down that coast, and they are in the happy state of having no history, for, in spite of the fact that the convoys they covered worked through the most dangerous seas, neither ship at any time made contact with enemy submarines nor lost vessels from the convoys which they protected.

In addition to these the Section Belge is now operating four of the latest type of motor minesweepers, and they have proved themselves in operations along our mine-infested coasts as highly efficient ships.

To-day the Section Belge numbers approximately three hundred and fifty men with roughly eighty officers. A large proportion of these officers serve, however, either with the Royal Navy itself or in shore and administrative posts.

DENMARK

THE navy of Denmark was overwhelmed in the first hours of the astonishing seizure of Denmark. The full story of those turbulent hours—for it was not even a matter of days—has been told in detail. The story of bewildered garrisons, of the avalanche of enemy forces, the utter and absolute completeness of surprise, is too well known to need recapitulation here. Denmark was like an island submerged under a tidal wave.

But there were men beyond the island. Many ships of the Danish Navy were at sea, fishermen escaped, and there were Danes in foreign countries who wished to make their protest against the ruthlessness of Germany. In England the Association of Free Danes came rapidly into being, and early in 1943 it decided that out of the reserves of seamen, fishermen and merchant-service officers, together with two naval officers who had escaped from Norway, they wished to make some contribution to the war at sea. After conversations with the British Admiralty it was decided that the manning of motor minesweepers—wanted in increasing numbers not only to replace trawlers and other minesweepers worn out by the very arduous service of four years of war, but to provide for the eventual sweeping of the Continental coasts prior to inevitable invasion—was the most useful service that the Danish Navy could perform, and by the autumn of 1943 some sixty men had been sent for training together with the two officers of the old Danish Navy and four ex-Merchant Navy officers, while two minesweepers had been set aside for manning by these crews.

It is not the least amongst the interesting things of this war that this decision was taken to form a section of the Royal Navy out of men who, technically at least, were classed as "enemy aliens," and perhaps even more dramatic is the fact that this decision coincided with the superb gesture of the Royal Danish Navy at Copenhagen.

By the middle of 1943 the German occupation of Denmark had become intolerable to many of the citizens of that small country. A wave of sabotage, of passive resistance to the German oppression, swept swiftly across the country. It culminated in the Danish Government's point-blank refusal to accept the ultimatum from Himmler, Hitler's new Minister of the Interior, which, amongst other things, provided for the institution of the death penalty for sabotage. As this refusal was made the Royal Danish Navy broke away from Denmark. Almost a score of ships, ranging from destroyers to motor patrol vessels, reached Swedish waters. More than forty of those that

remained were scuttled where they lay, blown up, or set on fire, so that the Germans could make no future use of them.

The men who man the little motor minesweepers of this newest of the "Sections" of the British Navy will remember that day with pride.

GREECE

CHAPTER I

I

THE island of Tinos lies below Andros in the exquisite cluster of the Cyclades. In the days of classic Greece, Delos, the Holy Island, ten miles to the southward, was the great religious meeting place of the Ionian people. To-day the mantle of Delos has fallen upon the sister island to the north. Yearly, at the Festival of the Assumption, from all the islands of that crowded sea, from the Greek mainland, from amongst the Balkan mountains, the pilgrims make their way to Tinos for the High Festival of the Greek Church. Something it has of Lourdes, or perhaps—going back further into the ancient history of the Greeks—something of the temple of Aesculapius at Epidaurus, for those who sleep in the precincts of the cathedral of the Assumption on the night before the ceremony are reputed to be healed of their diseases.

Religious enthusiasm has sometimes led to extraordinary demonstrations, and it has for more than a century been customary to send to the harbour of Tinos Greek warships. They carry to the island officials and high dignitaries of their church, and in the narrow streets on the day of the festival men of the Greek Navy line the route of the procession.

At nine o'clock on the morning of August 15th, 1940, the Greek cruiser *Helle*, lying two hundred yards off the shore, decorated with flags in honour of the festival, the centre of a brilliant fleet of caiques and island schooners, of fishing vessels and small boats, was torpedoed by an Italian submarine. Three torpedoes were fired. One hit the *Helle*, two missed and raced up the beach where they exploded. The fragments were collected and proved conclusively that the torpedoes were fired from an Italian submarine.

Helle was lying at anchor without steam for her engines. She took an immediate list, and though desperate attempts were made to beach her, the wind gave no assistance after her cables had been cut, and she sank where she had been hit.

This was the worst of the pre-declaration outrages of Italy against the Greeks. It was not the first. Very shortly after the declaration of war between Italy and France and Britain an auxiliary vessel of the Greek Navy had been bombed outside Crete and slightly damaged. The destroyer *Hydra*, sent from Melos at speed to investigate the attack, was herself bombed but again missed by Italian planes. Towards the end of July, twenty days before the sinking of the *Helle*, a

force of destroyers and submarines of the neutrality patrol in the Gulf of Patras was attacked by a high-flying plane, which dropped one single heavy bomb.

Immediately after the sinking of the *Helle* the Greek Admiralty sent two destroyers, the *King George I* and the *Queen Olga*, to convoy home the ships which had been at Tinos. Off the island of Syros they were attacked by an Italian bomber, which from a very high level, probably about twelve thousand five hundred feet, dropped three sticks of eight bombs each. The destroyers were travelling at thirty knots, and by violent evasive action managed to escape the assault, though the nearest bomb of the last stick fell very close to the *King George I*.

There was no excuse for these attacks. All four of them took place in Greek waters—the three later ones virtually in enclosed waters. At all times the Greek Admiralty, from the establishment of the neutrality patrol in June (it came into operation on the Italian declaration of war against France), had kept the belligerent powers informed of the movements of Greek warships. Tinos, in the very north of the Cyclades, was almost as far as it could possibly be from any of the disputed waters of the Mediterranean. The record of Italian belligerency, however, leaves no room for surprise at incidents of this nature. Recklessness where retaliation was not to be expected has matched pusillanimity in combat throughout recent Italian history. But in these days Fascist Italy still preserved that astonishing lath and plaster façade of strength that had so long deceived the outside world. Mussolini's eight million bayonets still appeared as a thick forest along the Mediterranean shores. Greece is a small country. Her total population—man, woman and child—was less by half a million than Mussolini's "forest of bayonets." Her army was weak, meagrely equipped and not mobilised. Her navy was almost pathetically small compared with the fleets of Italy.

When Mussolini stabbed France in the back the Greek Navy had two cruisers—one the ancient and heroic *Averoff* (a 10,000-ton ship which had fought in the Turkish war of 1912), the other the little *Helle* of 2,100 tons (built in 1913, and refitted as a minelayer in 1928). Neither of these ships was fit to lie in the line of battle. The Greeks' main naval strength lay in a flotilla of ten destroyers, two of them built in Britain in 1938 and comparable with British ships of the "H" class (1,350 tons, four 5-inch guns, eight torpedo tubes), four "Hydra" class completed in Italy in 1932 and similarly armed, and with these six modern ships four old destroyers of the "Aetos" class, built in 1912 in Great Britain and reconstructed in 1925. In addition to these there were thirteen torpedo-boats, ranging in date of construction from 1907 to 1915 and all of them under 300 tons, six sub-

marines completed in 1926/8, and about thirty auxiliaries—depot ships, minelayers, sweepers and the like.

At that date the Italian Fleet consisted of six battleships, seven heavy cruisers and twelve medium cruisers, fifty-seven destroyers, sixty-eight torpedo-boats, seventy motor torpedo-boats and a hundred and ten submarines.

It is scarcely necessary to develop these comparisons. Half a dozen even of the large destroyers of the "Esplorati" class were, on paper, sufficient to account for the whole navy of Greece.

The operative words are "on paper."

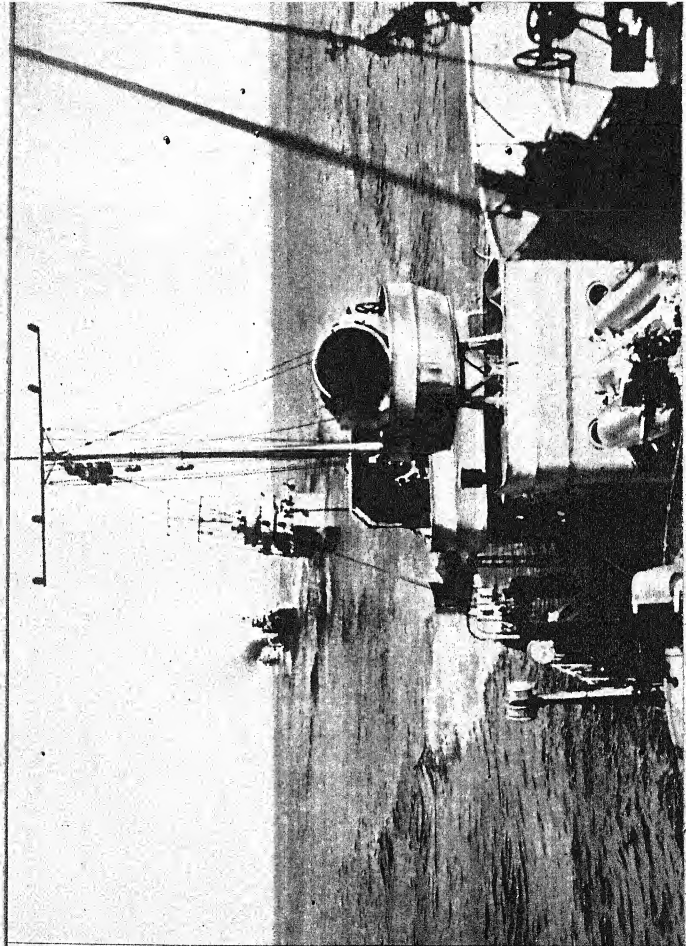
II

No formal protest was made on the sinking of the *Helle*, though the Greek Admiralty and the Greek Government had conclusive proof within their hands. Some little surprise was expressed in the outside world at that failure, but the position of Greece was, in those moments, more than delicate. Across her north-western frontier from Corfu to the Yugoslavian border she had the heavy threat of the Italian Army firmly entrenched in the raped hinterland of Albania. Across the waters of the Straits of Otranto (they are barely fifty miles wide) she had the Regia Aeronautica, and her Air Force was as exiguous as her navy.

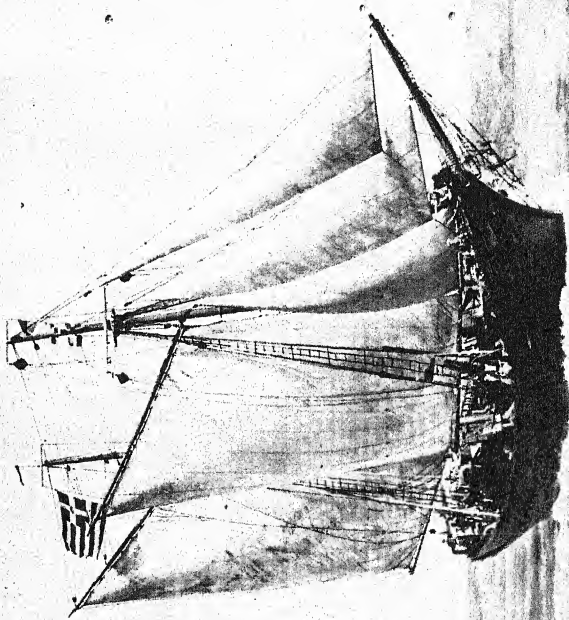
Yet even in these early days there was no question in the minds of the fighting men of Greece but that they would come to war. Quietly, methodically, after the sinking of the *Helle* they began their preparations for battle. That evening motor cyclists raced through the streets of Athens recalling all men of the navy to their ships. The scattered vessels of the neutrality patrol were concentrated in the Bay of Eleusis off the naval base of Salamis, and all ships were placed immediately upon a war footing. The mobilisation of the islands of Mytilene, Samos and Khios was put in hand, and in the first weeks of September a naval force under Captain (now Rear-Admiral) Gregory Mezeviris, who was then captain of the destroyers of the Greek Navy, was sent to convoy the troops to Dedeagach in the border province of Thrace. This force consisted of four destroyers with twelve hydroplanes of the Greek Air Arm to cover the five ships which carried the troops on the short journey. Submarines were reported on a number of occasions during the movement, but no attacks were made.

By the end of October the army movements were almost complete, the navy was entirely on a war footing, and the coastal defences—in so far as they existed—were manned and ready.

On October 28th Italy attacked over the Albanian border, and the war was begun.



Greek destroyers which defied the Italian Navy.



One of the lovely Greek sailing minesweepers in the Mediterranean.

III

The problems of admiralty in Greece are enormous. In relation to its area Greece has the longest coastline of any country in Europe not excepting even the fjord-indented shores of Norway. The coastline of the mainland alone is deeply indented, and to it must be added the elaborate outline of the Morea, the weird shape of the peninsula of Khalkidike and the coastlines of the innumerable islands. To protect even the "internal communications" of Greece the Greek Navy had to cover an area of eighty thousand square miles of the Aegean Sea, as well as the four hundred miles of deep indented coasts from Corfu to the end of Crete which directly faced the enemy.

These were the days before even the primary defeats of the Italian Navy. That force was still virtually intact, completely vainglorious. The British Navy was occupied intensely in the Atlantic by the opening up of the coastline of Europe from the North Cape to St. Jean de Luz in the Bay of Biscay. Its responsibilities in the open ocean had been enormously enhanced by the defection of France, and its losses throughout the hectic periods that followed the invasion of Norway had been heavy. Moreover, though the Battle of Britain had by then been won in the air over Kent and the English Channel, it had been won at a heavy cost, and there was little air support for the areas of the Mediterranean—even as there were few ships.

Greece knew that she would get, as she had been promised, all help that could be given her by the British Navy, but she knew also—by the cold addition of ship to ship—that that help could never match the strength of the Italian Navy on paper (always on paper). She knew that for the first—perhaps for a very long—period she must face the enemy alone, and her coasts were less than a hundred and fifty miles—five hours' steaming for the fast Italian ships—from his main naval base of Taranto. Corfu and the north of Greece were close enough to the Italian mainland for the fleets to operate not only under the protection of Italian bombers, but even of Italian fighters.

I have talked to Greek seamen who remember well that first night as the message came to them off Salamis. They had no doubts; they were seamen and they could weigh all the possibilities. They knew—none better—the comparative strengths. And even as the men of the Greek Army picked up their weapons to defy the invader, so the navy made ready for sea without flinching.

IV

Its first operation was an act of defiance. On the last night of October two Greek destroyers, *Spetsai* and *Psara*, slipped out of the Gulf of Patras at high speed, raced up the coast of the mainland, swept

past Corfu at thirty knots and, running with the utmost boldness into the enemy area, bombarded Italian positions on the Albanian coast. The impudence of this stroke appears to have been beyond even the comprehension of the Italian Admiralty. Mussolini claimed the central Mediterranean as his "triangle of fire." He claimed the Mediterranean as a whole as an Italian lake. But the Adriatic was the pool in his own backyard, and across his main traffic route, across the ferry lane between Brindisi and Valona, the little Greek Navy had broken, and on the shore of his European conquest—the sacred soil that he had invaded upon a Good Friday morning—the little ships of the little navy had poured their shells.

They came away untouched. Neither Italian submarine nor Italian destroyers, nor the enormous weight of the Italian cruisers challenged their passage. The first blood was to the Greeks.

The responsibilities of this handful of ships were enormous, and almost at once active operations had, for a short while, to be abandoned for the pedestrian needs of convoy escort. As the troops of the inner islands were brought in to their concentration points—and a very high proportion of the Greek Army is drawn from the islands of the Aegean Sea—they took on the escort duties. Between the convoys they ran anti-submarine patrols in all the channels between the islands.

There are two main routes, two great highways which Greece had to keep open in time of war: the one from the Black Sea through the Dardanelles by which a large quantity of the food of Greece came in, and the one from Alexandria, by way of Crete, up which the help that Britain had promised Greece must come. The southern section of this route—the section between Crete and Alexandria—was covered by the British Navy. From Suda Bay northwards to Athens the Greek Navy carried on for the most part alone. The little torpedo-boats, old, ill-armed, ill-equipped, none the less harried the Italian submarines whenever they appeared. Ships of the Greek Navy were not fitted with the Asdic instrument, which has played so important a part in the war against the U-boat. They depended only on the thin spray that follows a periscope for their attacks. For their defence they relied upon high speed and incessant zigzags. And day in and day out they kept the sea.

And in the narrow waters of the Aegean and off the western coasts, the coasts that face Italy, the submarines supplemented their patrols.

In the beginning of November a British naval and air base had been established in Greek territory. British troops were in Crete, and in the mountains the heroic Greek Army was pricking the bubble of Italian boasts. At Koritza, Argyrokastro and half a dozen other towns of the mountains the thrusts of the Greek Army had beaten back the Bersaglieri and Alpine troops—the much-advertised heroes of the Italian Army. And in the middle of the month, on Monday,

November 11th, Swordfish of the British Fleet Air Arm had crippled the main strength of the Italian Navy in Taranto harbour. On November 21st the Greek Army entered Koritza; and a week later, on November 27th, off Spartavento, the southern point of Sardinia, the Italian Navy suffered its second humiliation as it fled ignominiously to the shelter of the guns of Cagliari from the threat of an infinitely weaker British force. The situation of Greece was, for the time being, enormously improved.

Whatever desire for offensive operations the Italian Admiralty may have harboured in the early days was drastically curbed. None the less, despite their loss in ships and in prestige, the Italian Navy was still enormously powerful in comparison with the little navy of Greece. The only British squadron that could assist the Greeks was based far to the southward in Alexandria, nearly five hundred miles to the south-east of Salamis—and Taranto was only a hundred and fifty miles from the coasts of the Peloponnesus.

The war worked on into December. By the 6th all Southern Albania was in the hands of the Greek Army, and Marshal Badoglio had resigned from the supreme command. By the 9th General Sir Archibald Wavell had commenced the offensive that was to drive the Italian Army out of Egypt, and the humiliation of Italy as a whole was well begun. At sea the Greek Navy went efficiently and purposefully about its task.

In the middle of the month the old destroyer *Aetos* (she was built in 1911 for another and easier war, and at thirty years she was long past the theoretic useful life of a destroyer) was on convoy duty off the Euboea. In the closed waters between Skiathos and the Trikeri Channel she sighted an Italian submarine manœuvring to attack, went in at speed and dropped her depth-charges. For the first time the Greek Navy claimed the destruction of an Italian warship. It seems to have played a very considerable part in determining the behaviour of the host of submarines that Italy undoubtedly sent into the tortuous channels of the Aegean thereafter.

The Greek submarines, on the other hand, placed always the accent on offensive action. In the latter part of the month the submarine *Papanicolis* was engaged on a patrol in the Straits of Otranto. In the darkness of December 23rd she slipped up to the entrance of the Bay of Valona, and lay there submerged. At noon on Christmas Eve a convoy of six vessels, one of which was a very large ship of 15,000 tons, was sighted, escorted by six destroyers. (It is as well to remember that this escort was equal in strength to the whole modern destroyer force—which was the whole modern ship force—of the Greek Navy.) The *Papanicolis* was directly on the track of the convoy, and, lying stationary, the screen passed her.

When she was well inside the screen she manœuvred into the aiming

position and, as the sights came on, she fired four torpedoes. As she dived after the last of her fish had left, she heard three explosions one after the other. At once she was located by the destroyers of the escort and heavily attacked. A long series of depth charges rocked her as she lay far below the surface. An hour later Italian bombing planes took up the attack.

Her batteries were low and she was unable to stem the current that sweeps northwards through the Straits. Slowly the *Papanicolis* was driven northward deep into the Adriatic, and when, after five hours it appeared possible to surface, she was well up the coast of Dalmatia. After recharging her batteries, she submerged; but she was located again by Italian aircraft and, though she stayed below for nearly forty hours, she was hunted throughout Christmas Day. On the night of the 26th, however, *Papanicolis* managed to work her way back through the Straits of Otranto, and on the Friday she regained her base. Lieutenant-Commander Iatridis was promoted to the rank of Commander for his action and decorated, while officers and men of the submarine received the War Cross.

The *Papanicolis* was hardly back in her base when the *Proteus* (Lieutenant-Commander Hazikostandis), which had carried out a number of daring patrols in the Adriatic and in enemy waters without having the luck to find a target, fell in with an Italian convoy, strongly protected, off Valona. Attacking at once, she sank the large transport, *Sardagna*. But, owing to the loss of trim as the torpedoes were fired and some difficulty in regaining control of her movement, she broke surface, was sighted by an Italian destroyer—which was almost broadside on to her and not more than fifty yards away—was rammed and sank. All her crew were lost.

Her loss served as a spur not as a deterrent to her five sisters of the Greek submarine service.

V

The old year passed and the new year came in, and always the Greeks maintained the offensive. In this period there were three sweeps out of the Gulf of Patras and up towards Valona. In the first of these five destroyers took part. The destroyers left the Gulf of Patras in the late evening at high speed, heading north at dusk. In the second sweep two destroyers took part. In neither case did they have any luck, though they crossed the main traffic routes for the supply of the army in Albania and were almost the whole night in waters of vital importance to the prosecution of the Italian war.

On the third sweep four destroyers made the run. On this occasion it was reported that two Italian cruisers were in the port of Valona, and the Greek sweep closed right into the port. The Greek Com-

mander-in-Chief, Rear-Admiral Cavadias, despairing of making contact with the enemy in the incessant movement of a high-speed sweep, closed the shore and opened fire. For five minutes he continued with broadsides, hoping that his fire would induce enemy ships to reveal themselves—remember that with four destroyers he was hoping to engage two Italian cruisers. He had no luck; the enemy remained discreetly dark. There was no attempt at sea defence of Valona, and no attempt at interception of his force. In the dawn he returned for the third time to the Gulf of Patras. There was not even air attack at first light.

In this same period the submarine *Katsonis* had her first success. Patrolling in the Adriatic, she sighted an armed enemy tanker. Awkwardly placed at the moment of sighting, it appeared to Lieutenant-Commander Spanidis impossible for him to manœuvre into position for firing torpedoes. Therefore, disregarding the possibility of air attack or of attack by surface vessels not yet seen, he surfaced his ship, manned his gun and engaged the enemy. In a brisk action he succeeded in sinking the tanker by gun-fire.

On January 9th the submarine *Triton* (Lieutenant-Commander D. Zepos) was patrolling off Otranto in the mouth of the straits that lead to the Adriatic. In the half-light and in a choppy sea, she sighted a dark object silhouetted against the dawn. Her captain, after a tense moment, identified it as the conning-tower of an Italian submarine proceeding on the surface and, swinging his ship rapidly, he fired two torpedoes. Even as he began to submerge to his maximum depth, Commander Zepos saw through the periscope the burst of an explosion, and as they dropped down into the silence they heard other explosions follow it. In half an hour the *Triton* was being heavily attacked from the air, but despite the attacks she got clear away and back to her base. Again the Italian submarine service had suffered heavy loss.

In the mountains the Greek Army still fought magnificently. With their supplies carried on mules and donkeys and the backs of men, using the goat tracks of the high peaks, fighting down cliffs and through the brutal ravines of the Albanian mountains, they moved steadily forward, driving always the Italian Army ahead of them. Across the Mediterranean in Cyrenaica Bardia had fallen in the first week of the New Year, and the total of prisoners captured had been brought to ninety thousand. In the middle of the month the Italians had withdrawn from Kassala in the Sudan. By the end of the third week Tobruk had fallen, another twenty-five thousand prisoners had come in, and the Italian rout continued. On January 23rd Haile Selassie, Emperor of Abyssinia, re-entered his country. Everywhere Italy was in defeat: in Albania, in Libya, in Eritrea, in Somaliland and Abyssinia—and on the seas of Greece.

VI

The Greek destroyers were working now down the whole length of the Alexandrian life-line. The sweeps into the Adriatic had had to be abandoned in the urgent necessity of bringing the convoys through to Crete, to Athens, to Salonika. There is little news of the destroyers in this period save and except in their accounts of convoy runs, but throughout the month the submarines—reduced now to five—maintained their steady sweeping of the waters of the Valona artery.

Early in February the *Papanicolis* was again in the news, with an Italian troopship sunk in the Adriatic.

On February 23rd it was reported that Lieutenant-Commander Rotas, commanding the submarine *Nireus*, had sunk a heavily crowded enemy transport outside Valona. *Nireus* had been conspicuous even in this magnificent handful in the maintenance of her patrols against the enemy. The Mediterranean is not (as the legend would have us believe) a sea of perpetual sunshine and soft breezes. These submarines kept their patrol in winter gales, in the hard northerlies that blow down the long channel of the Adriatic, and in thick weather when the cold wind sweeps off the mountain snows and makes white fogs down the surface of the sea. *Nireus*, a little before this sinking, was on patrol in the Straits and was caught in a prolonged spell of thick weather. The uncertain currents, the twists and turnings of her course, the lack of sea-marks, made her position unsure. Her captain, "lost," decided to sit on the bottom until the weather cleared. After a long period below he came cautiously to periscope depth. When his periscope emerged from the surface the weather *was* clear—so was his position: he was inside Valona harbour!

Throughout February the steady wearing down of Italy went on. Benghazi had fallen, and Cyrenaica and Eastern Libya were in Allied hands to the triumphal arch of El Agheila. The British Navy in the western Mediterranean had so established its ascendancy that it had bombarded Genoa without reply. Italian Somaliland had fallen to the South Africans, and the position of Italy in Abyssinia had become more than precarious.

The war went into March.

VII

The destroyers were still guarding the convoys. With Egypt safe for the time being, and the power of Italy in Africa broken, the convoys were about to assume a vital importance. It was about this time that the decision was taken by the British Government to transfer from Cyrenaica and Libya the victorious army of General Wavell. Much has been written of that decision. Militarily it was a difficult, indeed

a painful, one to make, for though Italy had been beaten back over six hundred miles of the stony coast-line of the desert, though her armies had been battered into mass surrenders of the most incredible proportions, the North African war was not over. That was as clear to the men of the British Cabinet as it was to the Generals in Libya. Moreover, it had been reported in the last days of February that the remnants of the broken Italian Army in Libya had been reinforced by German mechanised units.

But Britain had given to Greece a solemn promise of assistance, and the honour of the British Empire was bound within that promise. The gallantry of Greece in her own fight had won the admiration of the world save only Italy and Germany. The little nation, ill-equipped, few in numbers, without war industries, had stood up to, fought off and soundly thrashed one of the two great bullies of the Axis. The decision to leave only a guard in western Cyrenaica, to trust to the barrier of the desert of Sirte, to leave the fight unfinished, was a decision of honour. Already British troops had landed in Crete, British air bases were established in Greece; they had played their part in the struggle. Already materials from the desperately thin British reserves had been sent to help in the equipment of the Greek Army, but the aid so far had been a trickle—now the full stream began.

And all the while the Greek submarines kept the sea. Early in March *Triton* came into the news again—she had been taken over by Lieutenant-Commander G. Zepos, a brother of her earlier captain. In March she sank a supply ship in convoy outside Valona and fired torpedoes at a destroyer of the escort. As she crash-dived away from the inevitable counter-attack, she heard explosions, but she does not claim the destroyer sunk. However, the loss of the supply ship was confirmed by the Italians themselves. For an hour and a half after she had fired her fish *Triton* was attacked incessantly by depth-charges, shaken, battered, knocked about, but she got away. A little later in the month she sank the Italian supply ship *Carnia* of 5,400 tons and seriously damaged a smaller ship.

And even while she was having her success the destroyers came into the news again. *Psara*, escorting a convoy in the Aegean Sea, sighted the periscope of a submarine manoeuvring into position to attack. Commander Constat increased speed and attacked at once with depth-charges. Returning to the attack again and again he brought up heavy quantities of oil and wreckage. This was the second submarine lost within a week in the Aegean, the previous one, the *Anfitrite*, having been sunk by a British vessel on convoy escort in the same area. A little later *Psara* made another attack, but this time there were no indications of success and she makes no claim.

Northern Africa was quiet this month. The British forces were

content to hold the broad line that they had gained while the heart of the army moved back to Alexandria and across the water. They might well have believed that it would be long before battle would be rejoined across the desert, for up to February 6th the Italians had surrendered more than a hundred and fifty thousand men in Libya apart from their losses in killed and wounded, while the British losses both on the North African seaboard and in East Africa totalled only one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four with less than five hundred killed among that total.

In East Africa the battle went swiftly to the British. From the Kenya border the force that swept through Somaliland had entered Abyssinia from the south. Eritrea was virtually in our hands. Abyssinia was cut off from the sea. The destroyers of the Italian Navy in the Red Sea had given one of the most extraordinary exhibitions of naval hysteria on record. The submarines of that area were lost except for two which made the long voyage round Africa to Axis ports,

On March 22nd the Greek destroyers were covering a convoy of five empty ships from the Piraeus to Alexandria. The movement was preparatory to the covering of the most important convoy of the war from Alexandria to Greece. They had passed through the Aegean and out into the open Mediterranean, and south of Crete at dusk they sighted fourteen German bombers. The convoy escort included one British corvette, operating under the command of Captain Mezeviris in *King George I* with other Greek destroyers. Germany was not at war with Greece, but in view of the fact that a British ship was taking part in the escort and there were British ships amongst the empty merchantmen, the attack was justified under international law. The planes came in immediately to attack, and in a swift and hectic half-hour two merchant ships of the convoy were sunk. The attack broke off with darkness, and the remainder of the ships were got to Alexandria without further damage.

At Alexandria the Greek destroyers turned and came back with a convoy of seven British troopships together with other vessels. This convoy was escorted by the *King George I* with three Australian destroyers and the anti-aircraft cruiser *Calcutta*. The escort was under the command of Captain Mezeviris. The convoy left Alexandria on March 26th, and in the afternoon of March 27th it received a signal from Admiral Cunningham instructing it to turn back for the period of darkness on the course it had taken from Alexandria, and at dawn to resume the original course to the north. Two Italian cruisers were reported out in an attempt to intercept it.

That was the first phase of the Battle of Matapan. It is considered certain that one of the primary objects of the big Italian Fleet movements which ended in that disaster was to cut off and destroy this rich prize. The story of the battle is too well known to need more

than a brief recapitulation here. H.M.S. *Orion*, with Vice-Admiral H. D. Pridham-Wippell on board, sighted on Friday morning a strong force of the Italian Navy, including a battleship of the "Littorio" class, in the area south of Otranto. The Admiral at once determined to draw the Italian force towards the main Fleet, under Sir Andrew Cunningham, a hundred and twenty miles to the east; and, playing the lame dog, kept within range of the *Littorio* throughout the morning.

Admiral Cunningham had immediately turned towards the enemy, with H.M.S. *Warspite*, *Barham* and *Valiant*, and at noon he sent in an attack by Swordfish 'planes from H.M.S. *Formidable*. This attack secured hits on the battleship, and badly damaged the cruiser *Pola*.

At nightfall the Fleets made contact, and at 10.26 p.m. battle was joined. The destroyer *Greyhound* illuminated the Italian cruiser at a range of two miles with her searchlights, and *Warspite* obtained hits with her opening salvo. *Fiume*, *Zara* and *Pola* (6-inch gun cruisers of the "Bande Nere" class) and a number of destroyers were wiped out.

The Greek Admiralty, on receiving the first news of the sighting of the Italian Fleet, flung its remaining destroyers to the southward at the utmost speed in an attempt to assist in the action, but the destroyers had been operating inside the Aegean. They reached the scene of the action when the battle was over, and could take no part in it other than to pick up the survivors of some of the Italian ships, and to make certain of the names of those that had been sunk.

Meanwhile the convoy which had cost Italy so dear turned with the dawn and steamed northward again. South of Italy it was attacked by a torpedo-carrying 'plane, but the attack was beaten off and the convoy got through to Greece.

It is not possible to dissect the minds and the intentions of the Axis chiefs, but it is probable that, if there were any hesitancy on the part of Germany, the defeat of Matapan—the third in the crushing series of humiliations that the Italian Navy had received—and the successful arrival of the British troops in Greece, determined the German decision to throw her own weight into the war against Greece. Already she had been compelled to bolster up Italy on the coast of Africa. That compulsion was to cost her very dear. She could not help her in Abyssinia, though there is not the slightest doubt that at one time she entertained ambitions in that direction.

There remained the third sphere of Italy's fiascos—the mountains of Albania, where the myth of Italian invincibility had long gone the way of Fascist boasts. On April 6th Germany invaded Greece.

CHAPTER II

I

IN the five months of the war with Italy the Greek Navy lost no single surface ship. One submarine, the *Proteus*, alone represents the entire success of the whole tremendous weight of the navy of Mussolini against the Greeks' devoted handful. What is of equal importance is that in the whole of that period also not a single merchant ship of all the convoys that were escorted by the Greek destroyers, of all the journeys that were made between island and island and between the archipelagoes and the mainland, fell either to an Italian submarine or to the Regia Aeronautica. The only two merchant ships, in fact, lost before the entry of Germany into this struggle of the Balkan peninsula were the two ships lost in the convoy of March 22nd—and they were lost to the direct intervention of Germany. The Greek Navy in those five months won in its own waters a moral victory that has not perhaps yet been fully appreciated at its real value.

After April 6th, 1941, there was a different war.

It is not possible with any nicety to balance the loss to Germany due to her partnership with Italy. Two things she gained by it—the dispersal of the British (and later of the Allied) war effort over northern and eastern Africa, and the closing of the Mediterranean to British and Allied merchant ships. But this last could only achieve importance as a part of the general Battle of the Atlantic. Germany lost the Battle of the Atlantic. The temporary gain of the Mediterranean was, therefore, a thing only of temporary value. To balance against these things there must be placed the army of Rommel and the army of von Arnim: there must be placed the effect upon morale of the crushing defeat in Tunisia in May of 1943: there must be balanced the loss of half her men in the garrison of Sicily, the losses in the defence of Italy: and there must be balanced above all the terrible wastage suffered by the Luftwaffe from the day in January of 1941 when the Stukas first threw themselves against a British convoy in the Sicilian narrows. It is estimated that in the three North African campaigns alone twelve thousand Axis' planes were lost, of which eight thousand were German. And the end of those campaigns saw the Allies with their Air Force not diminished but enormously, prodigiously, increased.

And there was yet another loss to be placed with those others in the ~~scale~~. Mussolini's attempt upon Greece was repulsed with ignominy. Not until Germany threw a heavy force down the passes to the Struma Valley was the resistance of Greece broken.

Britain had sent to Greece a reinforcement that represented the flower of her armies of the Near East. It was defeated with the armies

of Greece. It suffered desperately—even as the Royal Navy did—in the evacuation of Greece and the tragedy of Crete. But against that defeat was balanced the necessity for keeping throughout the Balkan areas all through the long years of war, all through the time when reinforcements were most desperately needed on the Russian front, a heavy army of occupation.

There is an almost dream-like quality—a nightmare quality—about the positive actions of Mussolini in the years before his downfall. In everything he touched he failed, and in everything he touched he created more responsibilities, more wastage, for his senior partner of the Axis. It is said—on the possibly doubtful authority of Count Grandi—that at the meeting between Mussolini and Hitler at Verona which immediately preceded the first collapse of the pinchbeck Caesar, the Führer reproached him on each of these points. This may or may not be the case—but the facts remain. Italy as an ally cost Germany more than she ever gained, or ever could gain, from her corrupt and pusillanimous people.

None the less, when Germany came to Greece—perhaps it is because of these things—she struck, and struck hard, throwing her full weight into the crushing of that gallant handful. She struck down the passes from Bulgaria, long since apostate to the ideal of Balkan solidarity. She struck by land and she struck upon the sea.

The Greek destroyers had been built in a day before the weight of air attack was properly adjudged. Their anti-aircraft armament was with many of the smaller and the older ships, non-existent. Even with the new destroyers it was weak. Germany struck at once against the Greek Navy by air, and the weight of that attack, its intensity and its ferocity, is the measure of the respect which the Greek Navy had engendered in the mind of Italy and of the Axis.

II

In the terrific pounding along the northern valleys the Greek Army was forced to fall back. On the 9th April Salonika was occupied, and the Yugoslav armies, fighting with the enthusiasm of despair in the mountains to the north, were cut off from the Greeks.

That was a black day and a black week for the Allies, for, even as the Germans commenced their irresistible onslaught on the thinned armies of the peninsula, they attacked simultaneously on the thinned armies of Libya. They swept through them. Tobruk held—but they by-passed it. On April 17th German forces reached the frontiers of Egypt.

On April 19th the Greeks began the evacuation by sea of Macedonia and Thrace. There was a Dunkirk in those far-off waters. The little ships of the Greek Navy took their share in it. In a strange and

motley fleet of caiques, in fishing vessels and some of the small torpedo-boats and the rest, they slipped out of Salonika Bay while the firing in the suburbs grew with the minutes in intensity. Their sails were red in the glare of the oil-tanks that had been fired by the British, in the brilliance of the burning houses. In a wind that grew swiftly to a full gale, in cold and in rain, they ran to the southward; and the Greek Navy played its part with them.

But on April 20th the British forces were compelled to withdraw from the line of Mount Olympus, and on the 22nd the Greek Army of the Epirus, cut off by the Germans, capitulated.

On the night of April 6th the Germans had begun the aerial bombardment of Greece. On that night the Piraeus was heavily attacked by long-range German aircraft. A merchant ship in the harbour was hit and blew up with a tremendous explosion that caused much damage in the area, but no ship of the Greek Navy in the Bay of Eleusis was damaged.

On Friday, April 11th, after numerous further attacks, German 'planes dropped large numbers of magnetic mines in the channel between Salamis and the coast of Attica. Almost two thousand five hundred years ago the Persians attempted to bottle within the waters of Eleusis Bay the fleet of the Athenians. They failed. Germany tried to do it without a fleet—and she failed too. Watchers from the shore, posted for the purpose, spotted the fall of the mines. With a rough and precarious plot of the position of the dangers, the ships of the Greek Fleet, sealed within their base, felt their way out. No ship was lost. They moved from the dangerous waters of Eleusis to the broad Bay of Megara, and lay there, spread widely against the danger of air attack.

The *Averoff*, the only heavy ship, the ancient hero of the Greek Navy, slipped out of the Gulf of Saronikos and very slowly—without escort, without assistance—made her way to the south and Alexandria. She could not fight against this impalpable foe. She had been many times bombed without being hit: there was no purpose served in her remaining in Greek waters.

The rest of the ships maintained their tasks. As they came in from patrols and from convoy escort, they scattered along the coast of Megara.

On the night of Sunday, April 13th, the *King George I* had moved from Skala Megaron in accordance with the policy of dispersal at dusk. She was steaming off the village of Sofiko on the Peloponnesus ~~at a~~ place where the high, mountainous shore dropped in a sea cliff—where the deep water came up to the rock face of the mountain.

The attack upon the Piraeus and the waters about it began at dusk. The night was light, and 'planes circling over the area passed close to where she lay almost against the face of the rock. One 'plane,

more expert than the rest, spied out her place of refuge. It circled for five minutes and, diving suddenly to six hundred metres, dropped a stick of heavy bombs. They missed, but one fell within six feet of the ship's side. The blast of the explosion blew a tremendous hole through the thin plating of the destroyer. She began to heel over, and it seemed apparent to everybody on board that she must sink. But there was no attempt to abandon her and, with her engineers working desperately in the heeling engine-room, they managed to get pumps and engines going, to get the threatened bulwarks shored up, and to creep with her to Salamis at dawn—the ship listing over at an angle of thirty degrees, her deck lipping the still waters of Saronikos.

At Salamis she was put into a floating dock, and repairs were begun. Captain Mezeviris had had his first heavy loss. He changed his flag to *Aetos*, and the fight continued.

On the 20th April, while at anchor off Megara, a daylight raid came in. *Psara* was attacked by a squadron of Stukas, the 'planes diving in from all angles. Her anti-aircraft armament was hopelessly insufficient to meet the challenge, and, after a brief and desperate fight, she was hit by a heavy bomb which blew away the whole of her bow section up to the bridge. Forty men were killed by the explosion. The rest of her hull was twisted, the bulkheads strained beyond hope of salvation, and slowly the after half began to sink. And while it sank the anti-aircraft crews on it continued to fight. Even while the water came up over the deck they fought on, and in those wild, magnificent minutes as she sank they brought down two Stukas of the German force.

On the 21st Captain Mezeviris moved his flag to *Hydra*, and as he moved it the Greek Government was taking its decision to withdraw from Greece.

On the 22nd the destroyers were ordered to leave the Piraeus with a convoy for Alexandria. It is possible that the Germans had foreknowledge of this departure. They were close to Athens now. From dawn to dusk hundreds of German 'planes wheeled over the Gulf, attacking everything that moved upon the waters. One by one the little torpedo-boats, unable to defend themselves, were battered out of existence. Merchant ships, caiques, fishing vessels, were attacked and sunk. Even as in the evening after the Battle of Salamis the waters by Psyttaleia and along the Attic shore were strewn with wrecks, so were they upon this evening of disaster.

At five o'clock in the evening, as *Hydra* moved out to take command of the battered ships that formed the convoy, she sighted a force of seventy Stukas. She was then north of the Island of Aegina (whose squadrons fought so nobly at Salamis). As the 'planes in their turn sighted the little Greek flagship, they divided into two

sections. Thirty-five Stukas turned towards the *Hydra*. Within seven minutes of the first sighting they attacked, one plane after another peeling off from the formation and screaming down on the little ship. After they had dropped their bombs they attacked with machine-gun fire.

Within three minutes of the opening of the attack the guns of *Hydra* were silent, their crews killed, the guns themselves out of action. Within a few minutes both engines were stopped by damage from near misses. The ship was a broken and battered hulk, utterly defenceless to the endless hail of the attack.

On the bridge her captain, Commander Pezopoulos, was lying dead. He had worn no helmet. It was a tradition in the Greek Navy that officers did not wear helmets in action. Before he died he had expressed his wish to go down with his ship. Captain Mezeviris was wounded: the First lieutenant, the Second lieutenant and the doctor were dead. A third of the crew was killed, many others were wounded. The decks were full of the maimed and the dying, and slippery with blood.

Captain Mezeviris gave the order to abandon ship. He slipped over the side and with the men who lived—there were no boats, no rafts left floating—he swam to a rock that showed above the water. From that most desperate refuge they were picked up by one of the few torpedo-boats that still floated in the dreadful Gulf.

The Battle of Greece was almost over. On Tuesday, April 22nd, the Greek Government left Athens for Crete in the early evening on board the destroyer *Queen Olga*, with the Commander-in-Chief of the Greek Navy, Rear-Admiral Cavadias. On Sunday, April 27th, the Germans entered Athens.

Of the three modern destroyers that were still afloat the *Spetsai* and the *Kondouriotos* reached Alexandria from Athens; the *Queen Olga* was at sea. Of the four old destroyers *Leon* had been damaged and, with a large section blown away, was towed to Suda Bay in Crete.

The *King George I*, in the floating dock at Salamis, as the Germans fought their way up across the plains beyond the capital, was a possible prize. Her people attempted to scuttle her, floating dock and all; but the dock had been damaged by bombing, and they were unable to move it from its berth. They used demolition charges and damaged her; but she fell into German hands, was repaired, and put into service eventually by the German Navy. She sank in Tunis Bay under a rain of bombs that matched this massacre of Saronikos when the Germans had to evacuate North Africa.

Leon was sunk by bombing as she lay in Suda Bay, when that brief campaign fell into disaster.

Ierax, *Panther* and *Aetos* also reached Alexandria. With *Averoff* and the depot ship *Hifaistos*, this was the Greek Navy—three new

destroyers, three old ships, three torpedo-boats and the *Hifaistos*: all that was left of thirty-three ships. With them stood nearly ninety per cent of the Merchant Navy of Greece that had been in the outer waters of the world carrying munitions, food and supplies for the Allies.

Greece was defeated, but Greece was not beaten. Greece fought on. Within fourteen days of the disaster the Greek Navy was working with the British, keeping the sea-routes of the eastern Mediterranean clear of the enemy.

CHAPTER III

I

ACROSS the still water of the river the clang of the riveters, the crash of metal against metal, the high whine of cutting machines and the shouts of men made a strange pattern, a symphony almost, of urgent work. The noise and thunder of it surrounded the little destroyer and the men ranked and grouped upon her decks. She was a destroyer of the "Hunt" class, a little ship of about 1,000 tons, armed with four dual-purpose 4-inch guns, carrying a multiple pom-pom, Oerlikons, depth-charge thrower and the rest—a modern ship, designed and built for the urgent needs of a war in which ships fight not only the sea but the air as well.

Facing the group that lined her decks stood the Greek Archimandrite in the brilliant gold and purple of his robes, and on a table in front of him was a cross, a silver bowl of water, two lighted candles and a small posy. While behind him the background of the shipyard noises went on, he dipped the flowers in the Holy water, sprinkled a little on the cross, and then, with the cross in one hand and the flowers in the other, performed the ancient ceremony of the blessing of the ship and of her company: "... that she and they might sail the seas in safety, that she and they might gather further honour to the glorious name of Greece." And then, remembering the magnificence of the past, he gave the farewell of the Spartan mothers: "Conquer or do not return." And at the masthead of the ship the white and blue striped ensign of the navy of Greece, with its golden crown, broke out.

As the priest stepped back the captain of the ship took his place. "Men of His Hellenic Majesty's ship *Adrias*," he said, "your country is in bondage. Your wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts, are suffering and starving in Greece. Your job is to liberate them. Here is a sound tool for that job. We will not, we cannot, fail." And under the dark blue commissioning pennant with its Hellenic cross the new ship came proudly into the service of the Hellenic Navy.

The *Adrias* was the second of the new ships built in British yards and handed over to the Greeks to replace the gallant losses of the battle of the Aegean. Before her there was the *Pindos*. After her there came *Miaoulis*, *Kanaris* and *Themistacles*. To each of those little ships there came the ceremony of the blessing, the flowers and the cross; and one by one they went out from England to the Mediterranean to take up the fight.

The Greek Navy at the commencement of the war against Italy had numbered two hundred officers and two thousand seven hundred men. It had more than thirty fighting ships and as many auxiliaries.

It came to Alexandria with a dozen ships of war. In the waters of Saronikos and the islands of Greece there were left behind more than half the personnel of the Greek Navy. But in the first days, in caiques and little ships, with the returning British forces and in their transports, many of the missing rejoined. And even in those first days the Greek Naval Command in its floating headquarters in the *Averoff* began the task of rebuilding the battered force. From the Greek Merchant Navy, from fishermen and islanders who had escaped, they set up a nucleus for the ships that were promised. They set up training establishments in Alexandria and at Port Said; they turned over some of the older ships to training purposes. Even the glorious *Averoff* became a school ship for the future. And out of the wooden caiques that had come over in numbers from the islands they made a fleet of sailing minesweepers, their wooden hulls rendering them immune to the magnetic mine.

To-day the Greek Navy numbers approximately three hundred and fifty officers and nearly six thousand men—twice the size of the little navy that stood so proudly and so magnificently against the weight of Italy. To-day the Greek Fleet has six new "Hunt" class destroyers—latest and most efficient of the small ship types that the British Navy has produced. It has still two survivors—*Kondouriotos* and *Spetsai*—of the great days of the battle of the Aegean, and the three old destroyers—*Panther*, *Aetos* and *Ierax*. It still has three of its great-hearted submarines—*Papanicolis*, *Katsonis* and *Nireus*. And it has, week by week and year by year since the disastrous days of April, 1941, played magnificently its part.

II

The *Averoff* was thirty years old. She had fought already in three wars. She was slow—so slow that her voyage from the Piraeus to Alexandria, while the German air dominated the waters of the islands, was a thing of almost desperate hazard. But she was not dead. For some months she lay in Alexandria. In the autumn she moved from Alexandria to Port Said, having been fitted with

light anti-aircraft guns in Alexandria harbour. At Port Said, acting as guard-ship at the entrance to the Suez Canal, she helped to fight off raids carried out by the Germans in their persistent attempts to block the waterway. At least one plane was placed to her credit then.

And in December of 1941, when Japan came into the war, there was a new and desperate need for shipping. Something of the leeway created by the losses in the evacuations of the Continent and by the defection of the French Navy, we had made up in the interim. New tonnage had come forward. The fifty lease-lend destroyers and the American coastguard cutters had made up something of Britain's vital deficiencies in destroyers. Improvisation, and the fleets of the other navies-in-exile had made good much of the rest. But here was a new sea disaster. Japan, with her extraordinarily powerful fleet—the third navy in the world—had come in, and with a single tremendous blow had gravely affected the strength and the fighting efficiency of the American Fleet. The British Navy, already spread beyond the apparent limits of men and of steel, had taken on weighty new responsibilities.

The Indian Ocean, hitherto only the haunt of a harried raider or two, became suddenly a potential battleground. To Bombay went the *Averoff*, and from the great Indian port she helped in convoy escort and in patrols.

III

The torpedo-boats which had escaped—*Sphendoni*, *Niki* and *Aspis*—were old, as old even as their flagship. But like her they still had heart and courage, and for long months off Alexandria they ran off-shore patrols, sharing the work with small British craft. *Sphendoni* was mentioned twice in dispatches for the admirable quality of her work in the waters off Port Said. The other ships had high commendations.

The old destroyers—*Aetos*, *Ierax* and *Panther*—shared this work at times, and helped with convoy work up the Palestine coasts. They were economical ships to run, and they were worked hard and continuously. It is not always easy to appreciate the quality and the extent of the work done outside the battle line. These were the days when German U-boats had come in to stiffen the more than doubtful qualities of the Italian Navy. The coasts of Egypt and of Palestine, and of Syria in the time of that lamentable campaign, were threatened always by the possibility of U-boat attack, and it was essential that escort be maintained—and be maintained always in the highest possible state of efficiency. These old ships worked with all the qualities of heart and courage of their opposite numbers on the English coast—the old "V" and "W" destroyers.

IV

It is not possible even now to give a full account of the work of the newer ships, but all through the long battle of the eastern Mediterranean their names appeared in the news, in the communiqués and the dispatches, with an unfailing regularity. They faced desperate days. The implementing of the British pledge to Greece had brought the enemy back to the Egyptian frontier. On the east the more than doubtful state of Irak and the impossibility of placing faith in the protestations of Vichy compelled the British to enter Syria and, in a brisk campaign, to take over that potential base for a Nazi pincer movement upon the Suez Canal. Meanwhile, to the south, the rapid progress of the South African and British forces was clearing up the last ghosts of Italy's Empire in Abyssinia.

In late June of 1941—three weeks after the evacuation of Crete—Germany attacked Russia. It had been said that the attack was delayed by the necessity for clearing the British forces out of Greece and destroying the resistance of the Greek Army. If that be true, that too can be chalked up against the lamentable results of Mussolini's folly, for, by delaying their attack until Midsummer Day was past, the Germans left themselves too little time to accomplish the enormous task of overwhelming European Russia.

The Syrian campaign had made the eastern flank of Egypt and the Canal safe. The indomitable defence of Tobruk had saved the western side; and the supplying of the garrison of Tobruk against all that the enemy could do with dive-bomber and high-level bomber, torpedo-plane, submarine and surface ship, is one of the greatest chapters in the history of the little ships of the war. In the Tobruk run the Greeks played their own part—both with the small merchantmen and the schooners of the actual supply lines, and in the escort of the harassed convoys.

And in the middle of November the second great thrust against the Axis armies in Libya began. Tobruk was relieved. And swiftly the tide of battle flowed again across Cyrenaica to Benghazi, and beyond Benghazi to the very edge again of the desert of Sirte. But there, by the incalculable fortune of a war of movement, the British met with heavy reverses. The tide swung back again, ebbing from victory to defeat. Tobruk, in the second rush, was lost. By Derna, by Halfaya Pass, by Sollum, by Sidi Rizegh, the British fell back deeper and deeper across the sands of the seaward desert, deeper and deeper into Egypt. The enemy was almost at the gates of Alexandria when, in one of the decisive battles of the war, the massed guns of the South African artillery and the British halted him at Alamein.

That thrust to within seventy miles of Alexandria put the great naval base in jeopardy. Seventy miles is little more than a quarter

of an hour's run for an enemy fighter, twenty minutes for a bomber. Britain had almost to abandon Alexandria during one period of the struggle. The heavy ships were moved away to other bases, the battle-ships withdrew. The British hold on the eastern basin of the Mediterranean was narrowed to a crescent along the shores of the Levant, from inside Alamein to the Turkish border. From Crete and from the desert aerodromes the German air dominated the inland sea. But in that area, and under all the threat that the enemy air could bring against them, the little ships fought on: British, Polish, Dutch—and Greek.

V

The exiles of Greece suffered in the early days fresh loss. The *Glafkos*, the submarine that had sunk an enemy supply ship off Heraklion, had been undergoing repairs at the time of the German invasion, in the base of Salamis. She made ready for sea with a desperate haste, and slipped out without trials on the long voyage to Alexandria. She reached there safely, was given further temporary repairs and sent to Malta, and the permanent work of repair had hardly been begun upon her when the Luftwaffe fell on Malta in all the fury of the first attacks. Lieutenant Aslanoglou was killed. *Glafkos* received a direct hit, and sank in Malta harbour.

The four survivors carried on, running their patrols up amongst their own islands, working into the Adriatic, hunting the Ionian Sea that washed the shores of the Peloponnesus and of the western mainland of Greece.

And in December of 1942 the submarines suffered their third loss. The *Triton* (commanded now by Lieutenant-Commander Condoyiannis) had penetrated the Sea of Crete, and, working right through the Cyclades, was hunting off Andros Island, which lies level with Athens to the north; and off Andros she fell in with an enemy convoy. Closing to within attacking range, she fired her first torpedoes, and hit and sank a merchantman. She was immediately attacked by two destroyers of the escort. Fifteen depth-charges were dropped within the first minutes, and near misses first extinguished her lights and then damaged the batteries. Leaks in the pressure hull let in salt water, and chlorine began to form in the battery space and spread from there swiftly through the whole of the submarine. Choking in the fumes and in the darkness, the men were rendered helpless.

Commander Condoyiannis was compelled to surface in order to try to clear his air. But he surfaced fighting. Even as he came up he got one of the destroyers in his sights and fired. His torpedoes hit her. Almost as the torpedoes left the *Triton's* tubes the other

destroyers rammed. *Triton* was overwhelmed: with her hull split open she foundered slowly in the heart of her own home waters. Most of her crew, together with her captain, were rescued.

Three submarines were left, and all through the rest of 1942 and 1943 their names cropped up in the Admiralty communiqués, in the records of the final disgrace of Italy. In June of 1943 *Katsonis* penetrated one of the island harbours and sank two German ships. (Commander Livas had taken over now from Commander Spanidis.) In April of 1943 she is credited in a communiqué with the sinking of a small supply ship and an Italian auxiliary patrol vessel. (The command had changed again, and her new captain was Commander Lascos.) In July of 1943 she sank another small supply ship, and then, penetrating Karlovassi harbour on the island of Samos, she attacked and hit a large transport lying at anchor. Scarcely a week later, operating in the Gulf of Laconia between the deep horns of the Morea, she slipped into Gytheion harbour, sank three supply ships, and a little later dealt with a naval auxiliary and a patrol vessel.

In 1942 Lieutenant-Commander Roussen took over the command of *Papanicolis*, and in December of that year he was credited with a large supply ship—a vessel of 6,500 tons—in the eastern Mediterranean. In April of 1943 *Papanicolis* got two more supply ships, and towards the end of the following month she sank one small German ship and two small vessels carrying stores. She had other victories—not all of them have yet been made public: but in the long months of 1943 the three survivors of the Greek submarine service most amply revenged their comrades.

CHAPTER IV

THE modern destroyers that were left after the loss of the *King George I*, the *Psara* and the *Hydra*, worked further afield. The history of the Malta convoys—those valiant relief expeditions that made possible the resistance of the beleaguered island—would be incomplete without a chapter on the Greeks. It was on one of the most desperate convoys in November of 1942 that *Queen Olga*, working with H.M.S. *Petard*, sank a U-boat.

Not all those convoy runs reached the columns of the newspapers. The operation was not only difficult, it was essentially delicate. Hints even of courses or of methods might have led at any moment to disaster, and much of that work will come out only at the end of the war. They were runs in which no submarines were sunk, but in which the skill and courage of the men of the destroyers—and almost all the Allied nations took part in them—was needed every moment of the double passage to ward off the incessant attacks of the enemy.

And in those runs, in the destroyer sweeps of the eastern basin, in the coastwise work that supported the army once the forward movement began again from Alamein, the Greek destroyers—the old ones of the battle of the Aegean and the new ones of the “Hunt” class—took their full and admirable share.

The history of Malta's exhilarating resistance is among the great stories of the war. There came a time when the beleaguered fortress was no longer beleaguered. As the campaign of Libya gave way to the battle of Tunisia, as the German hold on Tunisia shrank to the narrow circuit of the environs of Tunis, so the roadways to Malta opened.

Along those roadways the Greeks fought hard and well, and they were still fighting in the outer seas. While the Tunisian campaign was coming towards its triumphal conclusion *Adrias*—the ship which had been dedicated with such ceremony on the yellow waters of a North Country river—sank a submarine in the Atlantic. She was covering a convoy early in February when an attack was made by U-boat packs. She made contact with a submarine almost at once, and believes that she damaged it with her first pattern of depth-charges. The submarine broke surface for an instant, a portion of her bows being seen for a brief moment above the water. After the second attack a large oil patch came to the surface. A third attack saw the oil patch increase enormously across the sea, and when she made her last attack the instruments indicated that the target was sinking rapidly.

In April of 1943 I went up the Sicilian Channel for the tenth time this war. I was in the British destroyer *Lightning*, and with another destroyer of the “L” class, *Loyal*, we went up to the Skyrke Bank to “take through” two “Hunt” class destroyers on their way to Malta, and to hunt at the same time for supply convoys for Rommel's and von Arnim's men—any convoy which might have the nerve to dare the midnight Straits of Pantellaria. Nobody, as we moved out in the late afternoon from Bone, took that operation seriously. That was the measure of the difference between the old Sicilian Channel runs and the new.

One of the two “Hunt” class destroyers was the Greek ship *Miaoulis*. Her arrival in the western basin meant the concentration of almost the whole of the Greek fighting Navy in what were virtually their own home waters. With the opening up of the gateway from the west the eastern basin had opened also from the narrow crescent—bitterly contested and desperately held—that runs from the shores of Alamein to the coast of Syria. Our hold had swept back over the whole eastern basin of the Mediterranean. The Italian Navy no longer came to sea save in the suicide runs from Sicily across to Bizerta and the Bay of Tunis. Down the great depth of the two basins to west and

to east there was little for the navies to do save keep the convoys clear of submarines, and in that work the Greek "Hunts" acquitted themselves gallantly.

The Desert Army rushed upon Rommel at Mareth, and broke his strength across the Mareth Line. The Americans held him pinned in the hills to the east of Gafsa. The First Army crushed him down out of the northern Tunis mountains. Tunisia was won.

The battle of Africa was over, but the battle of the Mediterranean went on. It was true that it had been marked throughout these last phases by a complete cessation of serious activity on the part of the Italian Navy—if any of its earlier activity could have been called serious. Without challenge we opened the Sicilian narrows to merchant convoys; we swept the mines that had proved so heavy a block to the Allied forces round the Bay of Tunis, and up and down the coasts from Cape Bon to Cape Serrat; we occupied Bizerta and Tunis harbours, clearing the wrecks and rehabilitating the battered harbour installations; and we fed, supplied, moved our armies by the water routes without a ghost of interference from the enemy save for sporadic bombing attempts.

But on his own coasts the enemy still fought. He was trying in this period to reinforce Sicily against the blow he knew would come.

On the night of Tuesday, June 1st, a force of Allied destroyers, led by the flotilla leader *Jervis*, made contact with an enemy convoy off Cape Spartavento, the southernmost point of the "toe" of Italy. In a whirlwind action the two leading destroyers of the force sank two Italian merchant ships, one destroyer and one torpedo-boat. The second of the two destroyers was the *Queen Olga* of the Greek Navy. This action was fought almost under the shadow of the enemy's coast, yet the Allied force broke off the action, having accomplished its task of wrecking the convoy, without damage and without casualties. In a special signal made to the Greek ship the senior officer of the British force said that she had "fought with skill and distinction against the Italian destroyers."

For a little there was a pause—one of those breathless waitings upon great events—and then from Oran, from Algiers, from Bone, from Bizerta and Tunis, Malta and Tripoli, even from Alexandria, moved out the greatest armada of the war. In streams that became columns, in columns that became great fleets of ships, it converged on what had once been for the Allies "Bomb Alley"—the Sicilian narrows—in what had been once for the Axis the suicide channel. In the escorting of that migration of ships—there is no word in common usage big enough to describe it, there were upwards of two thousand seven hundred vessels upon the water—the whole Greek Navy was thrust. On the flanks, ahead and astern of the groups that moved towards the beaches, the little "Hunt" class destroyers raced backwards and

forwards, sweeping in long zigzags against the submarines that were known to be attempting to challenge the passage, their guns ready pointed to the sky to answer the Luftwaffe.

The Sicilian campaign passed through its brief and magnificent history, and in time with it—accelerating as the campaign accelerated—the story of Fascism came to its ignoble ending. On July 19th Mussolini went with his empty begging-bowl to his master at Verona to ask for reinforcements, but reinforcements were not forthcoming. In a little the Allied forces held not the narrow demilune of landing beaches, but the whole island from Marsala to Messina.

Again there was a little pause—and in that pause *Pindos* came into the news again. The German Admiralty had made frantic efforts to restore, if not the balance of the sea campaign, at least something of the adverse load under which their armies laboured. German U-boats had been injected into the Mediterranean like a blood transfusion in the hope that they might rouse that more than sickly patient to activity. They failed. They failed largely through the vigilance and the skill of the small destroyers that had been assembled to guard the flanks of the incessant Allied convoys.

We lost ships in the Mediterranean in that period: it would have been incredible had we not done so. But never in the history of amphibious campaigns where navies have been matched in the proportions in which we were matched in the Mediterranean, have losses been so small—so utterly without result upon the fortunes of the campaign as a whole. And the enemy had losses also. On the 22nd/23rd August *Pindos*, operating with a British destroyer near the island of Pantellaria, located a U-boat. In a series of swift attacks the U-boat was sunk.

On September 3rd the Eighth Army moved across the narrows of the Straits of Messina. Neither Scylla nor Charybdis hindered. For the first time since the bitter days of the evacuation of Athens a British Army was ashore upon the mainland of Europe. On either side of the Calabrian peninsula it moved forward in a sort of grim silence. There was little fighting; there was no air opposition. The Italian Army surrendered voluntarily as if under orders. It was under orders. In a little, even as we landed at Salerno, at Taranto, at Brindisi, the world was given the tremendous news of the unconditional surrender of Italy. And even as that news spread in the pitiful homes of occupied Europe and in the parliaments and courts of the Allies, there came the fresh news that the fleet of Italy was under the guns of Malta.

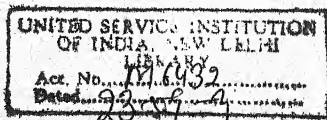
And in all this news the Greek destroyers had their part. To the beaches of Salerno, guarding the flanks of that tremendous convoy that, after hard battle, was to turn the whole fate of southern Italy, the Greek "Hunts" and the *Queen Olga* moved, sweeping U-boats

out of the way, challenging the last desperate efforts of the Luftwaffe. And to her were added the new British destroyer *Hursley* and the corvettes *Hyacinth*, *Coreopsis*, *Tamarisk* and *Peony*.

And south of them, as the *Italia* (that had been known as the *Littorio*), the *Vittorio Veneto* and the cruisers of the Spezia fleet headed towards Malta, there steamed out to meet them a British fleet. It was headed by *Warspite*, that grand old battleship that had met them before at Matapan—met them and thrashed them—*Warspite* that at times had seemed by her name and the valour of her reputation alone to hold these monstrous ships of Italy in check. And with *Warspite*, fittingly and properly, went the Greek destroyer *Kanaris*. She was not one of the old ships that had, in their weakness, defied the strength of Italy in the Aegean, but she was the symbol of the new, the renascent navy of Greece. And as the force turned to head the Italians in the most astonishing surrender of all modern naval history into Valetta harbour, she took her proper place upon the screen.

The *King George I* was sunk, and the *Psara* and the *Hydra*, the submarines *Proteus*, *Glafkos* and *Triton*, the little torpedo-boats and the auxiliaries—but here was the Greek Navy to see the end, the pitiful end of all the hopes of Fascist Italy.

But there was still a price to pay. The *Queen Olga*, working in the breathless actions of the coast of Italy after the conquest of the stepping stones of Sicily, was lost. And for her men and for those who had died before there can be one epitaph only—the words of Simonides for those Greeks who stood so gallantly upon an earlier day—the epitaph of the men of Thermopylae: "Stranger, bear this message to the Spartans, that we lie here obedient to their laws."



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